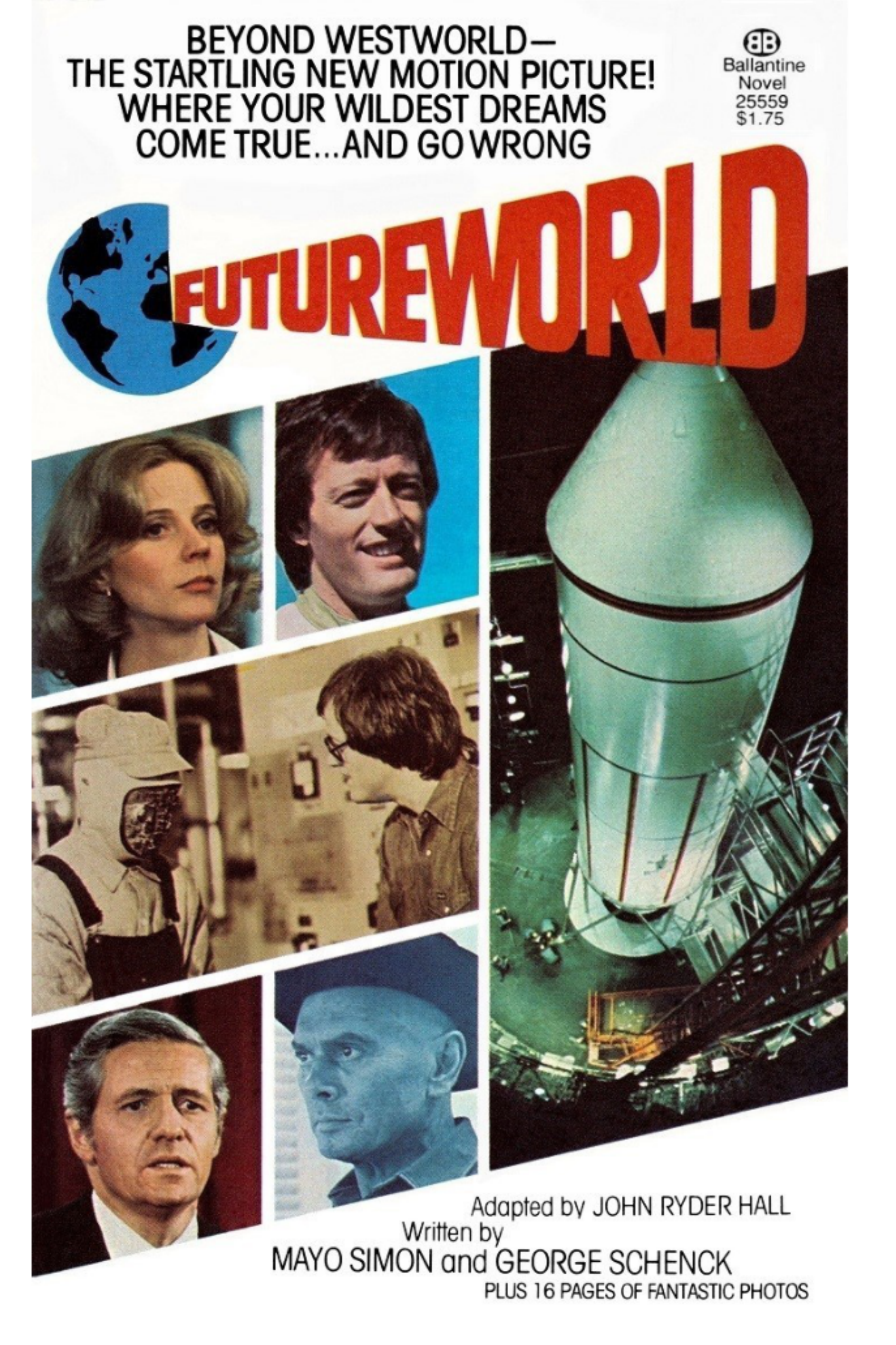


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THE STARTLING NEW MOTION PICTURE!
WHERE YOUR WILDEST DREAMS
COME TRUE...AND GO WRONG
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FUTUREWORLD
Adapted by JOHN RYDER HALL
Written by
MAYO SIMON and GEORGE SCHENCK
PLUS 16 PAGES OF FANTASTIC PHOTOS

# DELOS

the multi-billion dollar adult playground that offered the ultimate in almost-live entertainment before its deadly breakdown, has reopened with new fail-safe guard factors and even more fabulous realms of automated pleasure.

Those who can afford it act out their fantasies in absolute security. And among those who can afford it are the world's most powerful leaders.

But something is happening at Delos, something evil, something that Chuck Browning and Tracy Ballard have to find out before it's too late-for them . . . and the world . . .

Where nothing can go wrong . . . go wrong . . . go wrong . . .

**IN SEARCH OF DANGEROUS SECRETS . . .**

**WARNING TO ALL MODELS 400-700.**
**THIS AREA IS ABOVE HUMIDITY TOLERANCE LEVELS.**
**CONTROL PERMISSION REQUIRED BEFORE ENTERING.**

Tracy put her mouth to Chuck's ear and whispered, "I thought they shut down for six hours a night."

"Not the power house," he answered softly, his eyes studying the entrances to the lower tunnels.

"What do we do?" she asked, looking back over her shoulder nervously. The whole thing didn't seem like such a great idea now.

Chuck pointed to the robots moving through the machinery on several levels, on catwalks and aisles. "They're only Four Hundreds. I don't think they're programmed to stop us."

"Are you sure," Tracy whispered.

". . . No."

SAMUEL Z. ARKOFF PRESENTS
AN AUBREY COMPANY—PAUL N. LAZARUS, III PRODUCTION

**PETER FONDA • BLYTHE DANNER**

in

# FUTUREWORLD

Also Starring

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**STUART MARGOLIN**
**JOHN RYAN**

and

**YUL BRYNNER**
as “The Gunslinger”

Music by
**Fred Karlin**

Executive Producer
**SAMUEL Z. ARKOFF**

Produced by
**PAUL N. LAZARUS, III** and **JAMES T. AUBREY**

Screenplay by
**MAYO SIMON** and **GEORGE SCHENCK**

Directed by
**RICHARD T. HEFFRON**

An **AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL** Picture

# FUTUREWORLD

Written by
Mayo Simon
and George Schenck

Adapted by
John Ryder Hall

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Manufactured in the United States of America

For
Isaac Asimov
and all his components

# FUTUREWORLD

• • •

The roaring presses of a city newspaper have a thunder all their own. It isn't just noise, it's excitement. The massive black machines sit like burned skeletons of dinosaurs and within them whirl wide rollers, feeding newsprint as broad as the reach of a man's arms. Under and over, down and up, the endless newsprint races, mysteriously picking up ink in the bowels of the machines, becoming photographs and text, blaring headlines, box scores, red-squared FINAL, comic strips, advertisements for new cars and deodorant, white sales and movies.

Ink-stained printers, almost indistinguishable from their brethren of a hundred years before, tend the presses with casual expertise. They watch with their eyes for the mistake, listen with their ears for the malfunction deep within and out of sight. When all is well they hear nothing, see nothing. But let one thing malfunction—let the paperfeed start to creep sideways, let a gear go unoiled, let a semicircular printing plate loosen—and they are there in seconds.

Chuck Browning came into the huge pressroom, uncowed by the thunderous noise, enjoying the vibrations beneath his feet. In his mind *this* was where it happened. Not at the typewriters up in the newsroom, not in the ad department, not in the clickety-click of the wire-service teletypers. It happened here, in the pressroom. This is where it all came together: ink from a factory; pulp paper from the forests of Georgia, Oregon, or the Midwest; type set by the flying fingers of the typesetters on the third floor, sitting before their altar-like machines, composing, justifying into neatly edged columns; text from reporters; ads from the stores; photographs from hard-worked photographers trying to seem aloof from blood that ran out of crushed cars and bodies mutilated beyond recognition, trying to keep their interest in the repetitive pronouncements of politicians and the banal blatherings of actors plugging their newest picture.

Chuck grinned at the blue-and-orange-trimmed Goss presses, patting one as he cut through, now, from the parking lot to the newsroom. Coming down the aisle, he saw Shorty bending over and craning his neck to look up the line of racing paper, squinting at the set of the rollers. The old-time printer pulled back, took off his paper hat, worn in the traditional cap-fold of pulp, and started to wipe his forehead. He saw Chuck and grinned at the tall, casually dressed reporter.

Chuck shouted over the thunder of the presses, pitching his voice to cut through the noise. "Hey, Shorty, how many points are you giving on the Colts?"

The printer widened his grin and pulled a rag of waste from his back pocket to scrub at his hands. “Seven!” he shouted back.

Chuck stuck his hand in his pocket. “I got fifty bucks that says you’re wrong,” he bellowed, pulling out a folded clump of money and counting out some bills.

Shorty smiled. “You ain’t never gonna get rich being stupid.”

The tall, brown-haired reporter held out the money. “I got a hunch,” he said, grinning at his own gambler’s cliché.

The printer took his money, counted it, put it in a pocket of his blue overalls and took out a slip of paper. He punched a ballpoint pen, frowned at it, punched again, then wrote something on the paper. “I read your column today.” His voice was casual as he wrote.

Chuck raised his eyebrows. The printers rarely commented on what they printed unless they had caught someone in a gross error of fact—or in jest. “How did you like it?” he asked carefully.

Shorty handed him the slip of paper, smiling as he said, “It’s gonna wrap a lotta garbage.”

Pleased at catching the reporter, the printer sauntered away, chuckling at his own cleverness. Chuck shook his head and deftly snatched a copy of the newspaper from the mechanical stream that flowed past. Fipping the paper to the top fold, he scanned it quickly as he trotted up the steps and out the thick doors of the pressroom.

• • •

The newsroom was like most newsrooms of any big metropolitan daily: large, flatly lit by fluorescent tubes, a sea of cluttered desks set around thick, square, support columns taped with scores of pieces of paper. At the room’s end were the glassed-in offices of the editors, with water coolers, filing cabinets, and wastebaskets set around where they fitted and were out of the stream of traffic. Hunched over desks, hurrying down aisles with long slips of typeset copy, pecking at typewriters, or talking on phones were editors, reporters, rewrite men and a few “civilians.” Most of the employees were male, but some—the best and the worst and the in-between—were women.

A pair of skis leaned against a column by the assistant sportswriter, who was taping an interview with a coach in Detroit, who was saying almost the same things the coach in Los Angeles had said earlier that day and two coaches in San Francisco had said the day before. The sportswriter was scribbling on a piece of paper as he listened with half an ear, trying to think up new synonyms for “win” and “lose.”

A row of books about film, acting, and theater were sitting across the back of the drama critic’s desk, but he wasn’t in. A copy boy was

robbing his desk drawer of the chewing gum everyone knew he kept there. A reporter doing a series on computer crime was hunched over his typewriter, staring blindly at the paper, his fingers poised but unmoving.

Chuck threaded his way through the organized chaos and threw himself into his chair, flinging the copy of the paper onto his desktop. A reporter at the facing desk looked up as the wind from the flung copy stirred his own random stacks of copy sheets.

"Are you behind on your bills?" he asked without preamble.

"And a good morning to you!" Chuck answered, flipping the newspaper over to the lower half of the front page.

His fellow-reporter shook his head, as if to say he wasn't kidding. "Some guy's been calling for you," he said, gesturing toward the telephone. "Every five minutes for the last two hours. He's driving me nuts." The reporter slapped a hand down on the papers before him. "This Ackerman Library story is confusing enough without—"

"Did he leave a number?" Chuck asked, cutting in. This guy was *always* irritated, and Chuck had learned to ignore most of the man's blatherings. The reporter was about to answer Chuck when the phone rang on Chuck's desk. He picked it up with hardly a pause. "City room. Browning."

The voice in his ear was careful. *"Chuck* Browning . . . ?"

"That's right," he replied.

Chuck was used to people being careful on the phone, as well as in bars, alleys, backseats of limos, rooftops, hideouts, and police stations. Often informants did not want to reveal their identity or wanted to be certain that the "leak" would not be traced to them. Chuck had built a reputation for honesty and reliability. It was any reporter's stock in trade, but especially so for an investigative reporter whether he or she worked for a newspaper, a magazine, a wire service, or a television news department.

Chuck did not press the person on the line. He knew they usually reacted best when allowed to proceed at their own pace, although sometimes you had to prime the pump. You *always* had to give them encouragement, little signs that you were actually listening. Little *mmm's* and "Yeah's" and "Go on's" were not enough, though often used.

The voice on his phone hesitated, then spoke warily, still questioning. "A couple of years ago, you broke a story about the trouble in Westworld. You're the same guy, right?"

"Right. That was me. Now, who are *you?"* He made his question sound natural, rather than probing or suspicious.

"I got a story for you," the voice said cautiously.

"Okay," Chuck replied noncommittally. Some people's idea of a story was that they had planted a new lawn or that their neighbor was sleeping with his secretary. It wouldn't be the first time Chuck had gone through a long trust-me routine to find no story waiting on the other side.

"It'll blow your mind right out of your head." The voice was crafty, selling hard. "Probably get you another prize!"

"Okay." Chuck sighed. "Tell me."

How much was this going to cost him? He glanced at the glassed-in offices of his superiors. They often okayed payments for special information, but only in the case of sure-fire stories that carried a promise of big rewards. Much of the five- and ten-dollar payments came out of Chuck's own pocket and his fudging on his minuscule expense account hardly made up for it.

"You crazy? I ain't giving it away," the voice protested.

Nothing new here. "How much?"

There was a hesitation. "I don't know." (As much as you can get, of course, Chuck thought.) "All I want is for you to meet me somewhere. I'll tell you what I got and you pay me what it's worth."

Chuck sighed again. The "big" story that informants thought they could retire on were often five-dollar tips that were mainly paid just to keep open the conduits for future story material.

"But it's gotta be now," the voice continued. Another hesitation. "There's some people after me. I gotta get moving."

Chuck ignored the hard-sell trimmings. There was always some window dressing. An unwanted pregnancy, a Mafia connection, an irate husband, an operation urgently needed. Informants used very little imagination, Chuck mused. He preferred the "professionals," who snitched as a straight business proposition, knowing that too many no-shows and inaccuracies would put them out of a job. Chuck dealt often with drunks, junkies, thieves, and jealous wives. Each had his price. With some it was money, with others the satisfaction of vicarious revenge: angry wives who had found their husbands had mistresses and turned them in to the Internal Revenue Service; thieves who had been crossed on a fencing operation; cops who hated a superior; a politically ambitious attorney who wanted to make the opposition look bad. Chuck had known them all in his brief but varied career as a reporter.

"What's your name?" he asked.

Another hesitation. "Frenchy."

"Okay, Frenchy. I'll meet you in"—he looked at his watch—"ten

minutes, at the Hyatt House crossover. You know where that is?" Acknowledgment came in the term of a grunt. "What do you look like?"

"I seen your picture. I'll find you."

The phone went dead and Chuck looked at it.

The reporter at the next desk gazed over. "Anything?" he asked.

Chuck shrugged and hung up the phone. "It's my day for long shots."

He opened a desk drawer and looked in it. Nothing. Paper clips, eraser, a spare ribbon for his manual typewriter that he had finagled from Store's at great cost A little book called *20,0000 Words* that was a dictionary without definitions, a handy little volume for checking spelling. Two pencils, unsharpened, and an unfinished article on zero gravity welding that he had not finished because the interview with the Hughes Aircraft engineer had taken place in a bar and they'd gotten drunk. But no note from Lola, slipped into his desk as she'd passed by. He shut the drawer. Their affair must be over. He used to be able to count on three obscene notes a day from the talented head of the women's fashion department.

He rose and waved absently at his boss through the glass of his office wall.

The middle-aged man peered at him over his glasses, but made no gesture. The comings and goings of his reporters were often abused, he knew, but Chuck Browning was not like a lot of them, using the easy air of the office to hide afternoon drinking, lunchtime affairs in motels, or moonlighting technical writing. The editor turned again to the long list of complaints from a minority group and began dictating a letter to his secretary.

• • •

The Los Angeles traffic was heavy to the downtown street below the pedestrian bridge that crossed over it. Chuck leaned against the railing a moment and watched the city around him. He had grown up in L.A., seen the city change, seen the skyscrapers come—hardly a speck compared to New York's skyline, but impressive still, in Southern California's earthquake zone.

The cars and trucks streamed by below him and the heavy eleven-o'clock pedestrian traffic was normal. A steady course of people walked in both directions across the bridge: lawyers with briefcases, explaining things to clients; secretaries, flirting, or reading paperbacks as they walked to an early lunch; delivery boys, eyeing the secretaries; businessmen, self-important with gray suits and barbered faces; a

sauntering blue-uniformed cop, eyes watchful, in no hurry at all. In the glass covering that arched over the bridge, creating a tunnel, Chuck saw the upside-down reflections of the pedestrians and the blurred images of the cars below. His eye was caught by someone staggering.

Chuck kept an eye on the man's progress across the curving arc of the bridge. He had a peculiarly fixed gaze as though he were a drunk, but otherwise did not look like any of the winos who sometimes wandered into the area from nearby Skid Row.

The man crossed to Chuck's side of the glass tunnel, cutting rudely across in front of some gossiping mailroom youths, his fingers white upon the railing. He gave Chuck a look, then closed his eyes wearily.

"Are you Browning?"

Chuck turned toward him. "Frenchy?" The man looked sick. Chuck put out a hand as his informer started to answer, but instead Frenchy suddenly slumped.

His fall to the floor of the bridge was swift, as though someone had cut the strings that had held him shakily up. Chuck knelt next to him and unbuttoned his coat.

"What's the matter?" he asked, fear in his voice.

He felt something sticky under his fingers.

Chuck pulled back his hand where it had brushed Frenchy's shirt. Blood was all over it, soaking through, staining the inside of his jacket, the alarm-red splattering beginning to puddle. The reporter stared at the blood, unbelieving, but feeling the fluid thickening on his fingers.

As Frenchy tried to speak, his face contorted with pain. Chuck grabbed his shoulders, leaning close to him, trying to think of something to say, something to ask. He looked helplessly around. People were passing, but since Chuck's body hid most of the blood, they looked at Frenchy as if he were just another drunk.

Frenchy said something, but Chuck was waving at a passerby and didn't hear him. "Please," the reporter pleaded, "get an ambulance. This man is hurt!"

The man lifted his eyebrows, but walked on, his face curious but not concerned.

Chuck cursed and waved at another man. "Call an ambulance, will you? A man's been hurt here!"

The pedestrian stopped, a frown on his face. "Did he fall?"

"No . . . I . . . No, he's been hurt—badly!" Chuck shoved at the man. "Please—call an ambulance!"

"Uh, yeah—okay."

The man walked off, not very fast, then looked back. Chuck urged him on with a wave of his hand, and the man started trotting down the curve of the bridge. Not taking any chances, Chuck hailed a man going in the other direction.

"Hey! You! Get an ambulance! Call a cop, too!"

The man nodded, blinked, stared, then started walking quickly toward the other end of the bridge.

Frenchy said something and caught Chuck's attention. He bent down to the wounded man. "What was that? What did you say?"

The wounded man mumbled again and a trickle of blood appeared at the corner of his mouth.

"I can't *hear* you!" Chuck yelled, silently cursing the sound of the traffic below, despite the glass that vaulted over them. He bent and put his ear to Frenchy's mouth.

With an effort, Frenchy tried again. His lips worked but nothing came out. Then he took a deep breath and uttered one word.

"Delos!"

• • •

The fire-engine siren almost drowned out the screaming. The studio audience clapped and waved, jumped up and down, and shouted wildly. The bleachers in the television studio were filled mostly with women of various ages, plus a few husbands, slightly embarrassed at being where they were. But they, too, were caught up in the controlled hysteria of the audience.

Light flashed and ran in dotted lines around the big, thick letters that spelled out THE BIG BUNDLE. The Master of Ceremonies, suave and practiced, smiled widely and somewhat fatuously at the young man who was acting as if his life had just exploded and insanity was his prize.

Ron Thurlow leaped up and down, grinning foolishly, looking from the screaming, delighted, envious audience to the well-tailored emcee. He then turned to look again, waving his hands in delighted helplessness, at the big illuminated scoreboard that was blinking on and off in garish colors. Several scantily clad and brightly smiling girl, all dressed alike and from the same genetic mold, stood around, not knowing what to do exactly; but no one cared. The smiling emcee put his arm on the bouncing shoulder of the winner and held his microphone close, to overcome the shouts and cries of the audience.

"You're right!" he exclaimed ecstatically. "Ron Thurlow, you have *done* it! You have just won . . . The Big Bundle!" He faced one of the pretty girls, who came forward carrying a huge check before her.

"And what a bundle it is! First off, a check for . . . *fifty thousand dollars!"*

More screams came from the audience, a wave of sound that made the audio engineer wince. The girl made a show of handing Ron the big check. He grabbed it, stared at it in utter and near-hysterical wonder, then put a hand on top of his head and danced around. He staggered and two of the girls caught him, deftly turned him toward the emcee, who took his arm, smiling widely.

"And then . . . *and then* . . ." He watched the winning contestant's look of astonishment. "Twenty-*one* days at the most *fabulous* resort in the history of the world!"

The emcee turned toward a girl with a surgically-implanted smile who was pulling back the curtain on a rear projection screen. A dazzling display of computer graphics exploded in vivid colors, then dissolved to an aerial view of the Delos resort.

The Master of Ceremonies threw out his hand in a grand gesture. *"Delos!"* he cried.

Ron Thurlow momentarily ceased dancing and stared in unbelieving stupor at the screen. Then he exploded in a windmill of flailing arms, embracing the girl who had handed him the check, still crunched in his clenched fist. Finally he broke away, grabbed the emcee and hugged him almost viciously, his mouth open and yelling; but his words, unamplified, were lost in the general noise level. The emcee broke free with an effort, made a quip unheard in the noise, and brushed his hands over his carefully sprayed hair. Ron was jumping around, embracing the girls, stepping on toes, and acting as though he had completely lost his reason.

And everyone in the audience envied him.

As did every person in the television audience across the country and in the nine major marketing areas outside the United States, where the show was seen by satellite simulcast The emcee knew the audio engineer would now turn up the gain on his next words in order to drown out the audience. "That's right, Ron," he said, smiling widely. *"Delos!"* He paused for another wave of envious shrieks. "Where *ten thousand* perfect robots exist for your *pleasure!"* The delicate way he said "pleasure" was something he had practiced.

He grabbed Ron and pulled him around to face the cameras. Talking very fast he said, "You may choose Roman World—"

The rear projection screen showed tapes of each section of Delos as the Master of Ceremonies outlined Ron's choices.

"Roman World . . . a *lusty* treat for the senses . . . where *beautiful* women and handsome men . . . are yours to command, where gladiators *die* at the point of your sword." He waved his hand again

and the screen changed to a scene of pageantry and armored knights. *"Or* . . . Medieval World . . . an *exact* reconstruction of thirteenth-century Europe, where you may live an *absolute* king!" The emcee waved again and the screen revealed a beautiful garden scene. *"Or* . . . Spa World . . . a surrealistic garden of *pleasure* where *old age* and *pain* have been eliminated!"

Thurlow jumped again and the emcee caught his arm in a vise-like grip, trying to keep him within mike range.

*"Or* . . . *Futureworld* . . . where you will be transported throughout the solar system, commanding your very *own* rocket ship, enjoying the favors of young women of *weightless* beauty, soaring through space like an *astronaut* . . . *!"*

The emcee turned from the screen, which now showed a sleek spaceship flashing across a starry sky. "All *that,* and *more,* will be *yours* . . . Ron *Thurlow!"* There was a burst of music and the emcee began waving at the camera. "Now, we're a little late . . ." Thurlow broke free and began hugging two of the uniformed girls, and the emcee laughed indulgently. ". . . so good-bye for now, folks. We'll see you *next* week . . . when one of *you* may win . . . *The Biiiiig Bundle!"*

The credits began to roll over the image of Thurlow hopping about wildly, hugging the emcee and the pretty girls singly and in bunches, waving his check, grinning at the audience. The announcer's voice said, "Travel arrangements by Continental Airlines. This is the International Media Corporation Network."

The picture on several million tubes changed to a shot of a stylish young woman holding a hand mike and talking, though it was not *her* words that were heard. Another announcer was saying: "Tonight . . . Cronkite Award-winning Tracy Ballard, with an exclusive report from Washington on life-styles in the Eighties. Another positive news special from I.M.C."

The picture zoomed in on the very attractive young woman, a glossy, fashionable female in her late twenties. "This is Tracy Ballard, in Washington, for I.M.C."

• • •

Chuck Browning trotted up an escalator, swivel-hipping it around stationary passengers, and decanted into the fancy, polished lobby of I.M.C. headquarters. Without a look at the sunburst of golden wire that was the highly publicized sculpture dominating the high-ceilinged lobby, he ran toward the elevators and jammed his hand into a closing door. The door slid back with a hiss and Chuck wedged himself in. The other passengers more or less concealed their annoyance at the few seconds delay and the doors closed.

It took four stops of the high-speed elevator before Chuck got out. He hurried along a corridor, past a huge bright-plastic I.M.C. logo, and confronted a secretary who guarded the entrance to the main-floor conference room.

The woman wrinkled her beautiful, bored, carefully sophisticated, no-one-impresses-me-anymore nose and spoke distantly to the tall young man. “You’re late!”

Chuck leaned close and in a heavy whisper said, “I got a note from my teacher.” He patted his breast pocket with broad significance.

The secretary gave him a flashing, I-know-your-kind-charm-boy look and gestured toward the inner door.

Chuck winked at her and shoved open the conference room portal. He was immediately more circumspect in his movements. A number of men and women sat around the big, elliptical rosewood conference table which dominated the room. A narrower ellipse of rosewood, containing television screens for each person seated around the table, had risen out of the table’s center. Spying an empty seat, he slid along the wall, keeping an eye on the screen in front of him. He recognized the TV tape. It was an establishing shot for the old Westworld section of Delos. A stagecoach came around some frame buildings and drove into the center of the town and stopped in a cloud of dust. Cowboys rode past, a shopkeeper crossed the street, two women in long dresses and bonnets walked down the boardwalk.

Chuck noticed the tall, graying, dark-eyed, confident-looking man standing at the end of the table. His name was Duffy and he gave Chuck a quick look without missing a beat of his speech as Chuck sidled along.

“Two years ago,” Duffy was explaining, “the worst day in the history of Delos began with no obvious signs that anything would go wrong.” People descended from the stagecoach, dressed in wide hats and gunbelts, looking around with delight and wonder. “Our robots were behaving as programmed and”—he hesitated only fractionally before he went on—“though there had been some evidence of circuit malfunction, they were well within normal parameters.”

Chuck reached the empty chair and slipped into it. The woman seated next to him turned around and he recognized Tracy Ballard.

She frowned at him and whispered fiercely, “What the hell are *you* doing here?”

He smiled and laid a finger to his lips and pointed at the video monitor, which was showing more scenes of Westworld. A black-clad gunfighter was bracing one of two vacationers in the street.

“. . . At fourteen twenty hours we lost control,” Duffy went on. “Suddenly one of our most complicated robot gunslingers began to act

in a most vicious and unprogrammed manner." The two vacationers were arguing over who was to confront the bad guy. A tall, good-looking man turned to face the steely-eyed gunfighter. Duffy continued: "Before our very monitors"—the gunfighter drew, fired, and the vacationer spun around, falling awkwardly to the dust, facedown, and died—"he killed a guest. Then . . . cry havoc!"

The gunfighter in black was chasing the other vacationer through the streets, then through the very inner corridors and workshops of Westworld, buried beneath the surface city. Everywhere the robots were going berserk, killing the vacationers in a frenzy of unprogrammed mayhem.

The monitor shifted to Medieval World, where a Black Knight was dueling a fat and desperate guest, and winning.

A vice-president of I.M.C. spoke up, a graying, middle-aged man, impeccably tailored and well used to authority. "I thought your problems was only in Westworld."

Duffy shook his head. "No." He tipped his head toward Chuck, a slight smile on his lips. "Thanks to your Mr. Browning, Westworld got the brunt of the bad publicity, but the breakdown occurred throughout the resort."

The Black Knight sank his sword into the fat guest, pinning him to a rough trestle table.

Tracy pointed at the screen. "I gather the Black Knight is a robot?"

Duffy nodded. "Yes," he said, then his eyes went to the monitor, where the black-clad gunfighter was watching the escaping vacationer ride away through the desert that surrounded Delos. The robot's eyes were glittering, as though they were solarized ball bearings.

Arthur Holcombe, the I.M.C. vice-president, spoke up again. "How many guests were killed?" The gunfighter was now chasing the frightened vacationer across the rocky desert.

"We lost more than fifty," Duffy answered in a neutral voice. "And, of course, many of our own technicians paid the supreme penalty." The gunfighter shot down a technician, dressed in white coveralls and driving a small repair vehicle. "Aside from the human element, it was a financial and public-relations disaster of the first magnitude."

The gunfighter was riding hard after the scared vacationer, but Duffy touched a stud and the screens went gray. The elliptical television-set center of the table slowly sank until its top filled in the smooth table surface and the visitors on opposite sides could see one another again.

The lights came up at the same time and the men and women around the table shuffled about, lit cigarettes, and whispered to one

another. Duffy cleared his throat and caught their attention again.

"Ladies and gentlemen, those of us who have devoted our lives to creating Delos were stunned and shaken by the events I have shown you." His eyes roved from one another, a frank and honest face concerned with serious problems. "And yet," he continued, "we did not lose faith. In the last two years we have invested more than one-point-five *billion* dollars to rebuild our facilities." He paused to let the figure sink in.

Chuck smiled to himself. Some people think big investment needs big consideration, regardless of other priorities, he told himself.

"We have replaced every circuit," Duffy went on with deliberate emphasis. "Every program and every robot. The new Delos is not only the most fantastic resort in human history, it is also fail-safe."

Chuck restrained a snort. Where have I heard that before? he thought. Nothing can go wrong, go wrong, go wrong . . .

"Last month, as you know," Duffy proceeded, "we reopened the resort." He made a gesture of helplessness. "Human response has been good, but quite frankly, *not* as good as it should have been." His eyes were momentraily troubled, then he forced himself into a blander tone. "Our problem is the memory of the disaster at Westworld." His well-manicured hand gestured around the table at those assembled. "And that is why we have come to *you.* We offer the I.M.C. network an absolute exclusive story for all media. Every phase of our operation will be open to you." His eyes flicked to Chuck Browning, then away. "All we ask, in return," he said earnestly, "is that you treat us in a fair and positive manner."

His eyes came back to Chuck's face and the reporter shrugged almost imperceptively.

• • •

Arthur Holcombe sat down in his tall-backed leather chair and indicated for Chuck to sit across the vice-president's wide, polished desk.

They settled back and Chuck continued with the conversation they had been having as they walked from the conference room back into Holcombe's over-large, over-furnished, look-how-impressive-I-am office.

". . . They closed the Westworld section completely and I don't think they have plans to open it for years—if ever. Just too much of a bad-vibes situation there." He shook his head. "Too bad, too, because it was fun, a part of Americana, and in many ways, probably cheaper to run and construct than some parts of Delos." The vice-president

nodded, lighting up a cigar. “Yes, and more Americans relate to the West than to Europe of the Middle Ages, no matter what—”

The office door swung open with a bang and Tracy Ballard stood there, glaring. The two men looked at her with some surprise, watching her breathe heavily, trying to calm herself enough to speak. When she found her voice she slammed the door behind her as she strode across the thickly carpeted room.

“You will *not* do this to me, Arthur,” she said with loud emphasis. “Not for one damn minute!” She loomed over the executive menacingly. “Do you hear me?”

The vice-president blinked and took his cigar from his mouth.

“They can hear you in the lobby,” Chuck advised, a slight smile on his lips.

Tracy’s head swung in his direction and she snapped at him through a tumble of her thick, golden hair. “I’m not talking to *you,* mister!”

Chuck grinned broadly as she turned back to Arthur Holcombe with fire in her eye.

“Now, Arthur,” she said, changing her tone to firm annoyance, rather than outright anger, “you promised me that the Delos story would be *mine!* Exclusive to television and exclusive to *me.* Is that true?” she demanded.

Holcombe nodded uncomfortably. “Yes . . .”

She gestured toward Chuck without looking at him. “Then will you tell me why this ink-stained Neanderthal was invited to our meeting?”

Holcombe sighed and then nodded. “I’ll try—” he began.

Tracy made a wide circle with her arms, groaned with frustration, and pointed again at Chuck. “For God’s sake, Arthur, this man is an anachronism. Nobody *reads* anymore. Certainly not anyone under fifty. And certainly not newspapers!” Her hand flailed the air in Chuck’s direction. “Why would you risk a wonderful video story to satisfy the ego of an obsolete hatchet man?”

“Is that me?” Chuck asked Holcombe mildly, pointing at himself.

“Shut up, you!” Tracy yelled, waving her hand at Chuck and returning to Arthur Holcombe.

“Right,” Chuck said briskly, earning him a lightning stab of Tracy’s blue eyes.

“He has an . . . angle,” Holcombe said in an uncomfortably tight voice. “I . . . I want to pursue it.”

“What?” Tracy flashed back in astonishment.

“Call it a hunch,” Chuck said blandly.

She put her fists on her hips and turned around, taking several

paces around the room. “Wonderful!” she said, slapping her hip and looking at the ceiling. Her hand went out, palm up, as though imploring the gods. “And when the people at Delos find out you’re sending Mister Bad News himself, *that* will be the end of our exclusive!”

Holcombe shook his head as Tracy turned back toward him. “I told Mister Duffy what I had in mind.” The executive shrugged. “He has no objection.”

Tracy Ballard’s eyes flared once again. “Well, I do!”

“Yes, I gathered as much.” Holcombe tapped his cigar ashes into a receptable, taking the opportunity to give Chuck a look. “But I would like to remind you that, while you are, indeed, a glamorous and highly paid television correspondent, you are still . . . an employee.” Tracy sensed rather than saw Chuck’s involuntary grin and gave him a dark look as the I.M.C. vice-president continued. “In fact, you are *my* employee.” There was a steely edge to Holcombe’s voice, as if he had compromised just that far and no farther. “And, unless you would like to spend the next five years doing weather and fashion in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, you will now shut up and do as you’re told.”

The woman correspondent took a long deep breath, her eyes dark and brooding, the seething rage obviously boiling up within her. Chuck watched her objectively. Both of them knew the great power of networks. They both knew the network would never *actually* send such a well-known personality to Sioux Falls, except symbolically. Even big-time network news people could be “reassigned” to foreign posts, where they were the top network dog there; but it was still out of the action of New York, Washington, or Los Angeles. A year or so of that, appearing once or twice a month on filmed or taped sections of the network news, effectively blocked from the Big Stories, and their careers would probably be permanently damaged. Out-of-country posts were fine for someone on the way up, but not someone who had already achieved the enviable position Tracy Ballard had. Chuck watched her inner turmoil and felt a certain sympathy. No one liked to be pressured or threatened, either personally or in one’s career, but still Chuck had his job to do, and the definitely nagging suspicion that *something* was wrong in Delos overrode any minor compunctions he had about intruding upon Tracy Ballard’s sphere of activity.

Her mouth moved and for a second she had too much anger in her to speak. Then it came out in a rush. “We will see about that!” she enunciated with a harsh, deliberate insolence. She glared at both men, then left the office.

Holcombe winced as she slammed the door.

“Say, Art—you’ve really got a way with women,” Chuck said with a

grin.

The I.M.C. vice-president glowered at his reporter. “You’d better come up with something.” He glared at the closed door. “That lady has more power than she knows.”

Chuck heaved his lean figure to its feet and waved at Arthur Holcombe as he left the office, his shoes silent on the thick rug. “See you in Sioux Falls, Arthur.” He paused in the opened door and glanced back. “Not a bad town, actually.”

He left with a grin and Holcombe glowering at the closed doar. “Funny!” he said in a flat voice. He looked at his cigar. It had gone out.

• • •

Tracy stepped onto the sleek, neon-striped, stainless-steel-mirrored escalator and rode it down, seething, but trying to contain her fury. Chuck appeared at the top and eased his way down quickly, bypassing the people who had gotten on after her. He excused himself, dodged around a fat lady, and caught up to Tracy.

He put out a hand toward her. “Hey, Socks! Don’t go away mad.”

Tracy turned her head quickly and frowned at him. “What do *you* want?” she demanded, her voice a most unmodulated growl.

He stepped on the escalator step just above her, smiling at her in his airy way. “Just thought I’d tell you I like your style.”

She did not respond, except to turn and look at their downward path, uncrossing her arms and grasping the rail in an attempt to act less uptight.

“I thought old Arthur was going to swallow his corporate stripes,” Chuck said. “You’ve come a long way.”

Tracy whipped her head around at him again. “You mean you’re sorry you fired me?”

“Socks,” Chuck said placatingly, “you just weren’t a very good reporter.”

She turned back and spoke with fervent words that had a trace of practiced idealism. “I was a kid out of college who thought newspapers ought to be more than dirt and bad news.”

The tall, brown-haired reporter showed her his palms. “Come on. Bad news is what the truth is all about.” He stepped down to her level and she edged over reluctantly.

“Not to me!” she snapped. “And not to television. People have enough troubles without us loading them up with more.”

Chuck shook his head as they made a turn to the next Down

escalator. “That’s an excuse to deliver glamorized horse pucky instead of news.” Her slowness in the turn put Chuck on the escalator ahead of her and now their heads were on a level.

“You know, you’d think that even so dull a brain as *yours* would finally get the message. *I* have fifty-five million viewers worldwide. You have a few thousand old crones in the public library.” She smiled viciously at him. “Why don’t you wise up, mister?” She leaned toward him to spit her last words in his face. *“Nobody reads!”*

He smiled back at Tracy and his manner and words infuriated her. “Then you’ve got nothing to worry about. I’ll write my story for the old crones while you dazzle the world with electronic close-ups.” He held out his hand. “In the meantime, how about a truce?”

She didn’t take his hand, and watched him suspiciously as they took a turn onto another escalator. “I don’t trust you,” she said warily.

“But you like me a little, right?” His grin was wide and confident. “And we’ll be alone together for a week. So what the hell!” He waggled his extended hand.

Tracy did not rise to the bait. “If you foul up my story . . .” she said warningly.

Chuck looked innocent. “How can I do that? I’m just playing a hunch.” He gestured with his extended hand. “Anyway, Delos is now perfect, so there’s nothing to worry about, okay?” He stuck his hand back toward her.

“I don’t like being called Socks,” she said.

Chuck shrugged. “I can’t help it. First time I saw you, you had those red stocking on. Remember? Absolutely beautiful. Couldn’t sleep for a week after that.”

“Yeah,” Tracy nodded, making a face. “And then you fired me.”

“That was business,” he said. Again, he thrust his big, bony hand at her. She looked at it, but didn’t take it. “Come on,” he urged, “whaddaya say? A truce?”

She gave a little in her stern manner, but pointedly ignored the proffered handshake as they got off the escalator at the main floor. “I’ll . . . I’ll think about it.”

Without a word, she about-faced and walked briskly toward the side door. Chuck watched her go, making a little bet with himself. When she turned, just as she reached the exit, and glanced back over her shoulder, he grinned. She swiveled her head around and went out through the thick glass door as fast as possible.

“That’s a fine-looking woman,” he muttered to himself. A passerby looked at him and Chuck grinned brightly at him. Unembarrassed, he spoke aloud. “I said, that’s a fine-looking woman.”

The man frowned at him, then appeared embarrassed himself and hurried off. Chuck turned the other way and strode across the big, glittery lobby whistling. Passing the space-shuttle display, he went out onto the street in front of the building.

Tracy paused on her side street, licked her lips nervously, thinking about Chuck Browning and their brief acquaintance some years before. For some reason she remembered that he always called escalators ess-cal-a-tores and it unaccountably amused her. She ceased smiling when she remembered she was supposed to be angry . . . and had good reason to be.

• • •

The First Class area of the jetliner was divided into private compartments not unlike those of a European train. Chuck Browning stood in the aisle, looking over the back of a bald-headed Russian security agent as he whispered into the ear of an elderly Russian general. Chuck thought he and his plump wife *both* resembled the late Premier Khrushchev. The reporter saw the general look around the K.G.B. type and give Chuck a cold, fishy stare.

The whisper was not designed to be discreet. “Nyet!”

The security man straightened and turned to Chuck after he had pulled the curtains closed. “General Karnovsky regrets,” the bald-headed Russian shrugged, and with little regret in his voice or manner, “but he does not give interviews now. He is on vacation.” He shook his head, smiling, but the smile was more a baring of teeth, a mechanical action, like that of a mannequin who had learned that certain social skills were expected. “Strictly non-political,” he added.

“I’m just looking for a little human interest, that’s all,” Chuck told him. He touched the security man’s shoulder. “Listen, a good interview in an important American paper could do the general a lot of good. Maybe get him a promotion.”

The K.G.B. type looked at the fingers on his shoulder and Chuck dropped his hand. “The general does not need a promotion,” he said in a flat, no-nonsense voice.

Chuck shrugged. “You got a point.” He tried to come up with another angle, but the security man gestured politely down the aisle of closed curtains.

“Good-bye,” he said firmly.

Chuck nodded in regret and stuck a card into the security man’s breast pocket. “Just in case,” he said.

He then walked toward the First Class seating area, and paused to look back at the security man. He was nowhere in sight, but a

crumpled card lay like a rebuke on the deep pile carpet.

Chuck nodded to himself. Rejection was commonplace to a reporter. As he walked down the aisle between the rows of large, comfortable seats, and passed a wide variety of international businessmen, he thought about how a reporter must learn to accept rejection and not be crushed by it. He must also learn not to be overly flattered when he was sought after, for almost always it was to be used for something he wanted sold or promoted.

"We are a conduit," he thought to himself. He remembered Napoleon Bonaparte's words: "Three hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets."

Chuck also remembered the words of the late Lenny Bruce, who had said, "Publicity is stronger than sanity: given the right P.R., armpit hair on female singers could become a national fetish."

Grinning, Chuck passed a group of Japanese businessmen chatting brightly, stepped around an Indian and his dark-browed wife in a beautiful sari who were parading up the aisle, and overheard an American with a thick briefcase say, "My company is vacuum-welding gizmacks to extruded gormacles out in space right now!"

Chuck stepped into a vacant seat space to allow a plump pair of Nigerian couples, dressed in ornamented caftans and hats, to get by. For some reason still thinking of journalism and the press, he recalled Randolph Churchill's line "The Press is the greatest curse of civilization." Chuck didn't agree. As life became more complex and complicated there was a growing need to communicate. The minorities—racial, social, scientific, ethnic, biological, anthropological, and whatever—needed more and more to communicate with others, with themselves, with society as a whole. Only the press—in all its many-splendored parts—could do that, Chuck thought. "When you see a mistake in a newspaper," an old reporter named Harry Warner had told Chuck, "the only thing you can be sure about is that there will be more where that one came from."

Chuck dodged his way through the international crowd, all of them in varying degrees of vacation spirits, and reached the lounge. A thickset man wearing in his lapel the pin of the Zero Population Growth Party, was telling some others, "We've licked it in America. Now if we can just convince the rest of the world that overpopulation reduces the quality of life for *everyone* . . ."

Chuck ordered a drink from the bartender, and remembered Mark Twain's dictum that "A newspaper is not just for reporting the news as it is, but to make people mad enough to do something about it."

That was what Chuck believed he was doing. The hunch about the Delos story was not one hundred percent certain. He had had hunches

before—based on rumors, intuition, and tips. He'd once spent two weeks researching a hunch that the Los Angeles Metropolitan Water District was recycling sewer water into the water supply. It was perfectly logical, as water was getting more and more scarce. And chemically feasible. But the public distaste for such a venture would have been enormous, had the story been true. Actually, Chuck wasn't all that certain it would not be true in the near future.

He collected his drink, along with the thought that Oscar Wilde called journalism "organized gossip." Edging around an Arab prince who was discussing his entry in the upcoming Grand Prix, Chuck found an empty seat next to Tracy Ballard.

As the lanky reporter sighed into the plush seat, Tracy looked up from her small hand-held tape recorder, which she used for recording notes to herself.

She indicated the multi-nationals around her. "We can get good footage on the plane, emphasizing the glamour and importance of the Delos guests." She narrowed her eyes and tilted her head as she surveyed the lounge. "Maybe a *montage* of international types."

Chuck grinned as she clicked off her recorder. She had turned a note to herself into an opening conversational gambit with him.

"How did *you* do?" she asked, tipping her head back toward the Russian general.

"Terrible. I first tried the Iranian oil minister. Nothing." He shrugged. "Then Karnovsky said 'Nyet,' and that leaves Takaguchi over there as my last shot." He tipped his glass toward three Japanese businessmen engaged in animated conversation.

One of the short, distinguished-looking men was older, obviously the boss, and spoke the least. The others were younger and quickly deferred to the man whenever he spoke.

Chuck spoke to Tracy as he studied Takaguchi. "I don't know. It just bothers me. The Delos guest list looks like a rerun of the last Geneva Conference." He gestured around them. "Rocket experts, oil ministers, heavyweight electronics people."

"Well, for God's sake," Tracy growled with exasperation, "at twelve hundred dollars a day who else can afford the price?" She shook her head vigorously. "You're trying to make something out of nothing at all."

Chuck took a sip of his drink. "Yeah, I guess you're right," he responded, still looking gloomily about.

Nearby was a pair of middle-aged men who were smiling broadly and whispering to each other. They reminded Chuck of two guilty boys giggling over a dirty magazine. He pointed at them and asked

Tracy, "Do you think those are typical Delos customers?"

Tracy's shoulders lifted and fell. "Middle-aged but not grown up. The kind that look at their secretary's legs every time she bends over the filing cabinet."

Chuck grinned at her. "What's wrong with looking at nice legs?"

"Nothing, except that sneaky part." She quivered. "I just hate it"

Chuck got to his feet and announced, "I'll just do a little reportorial eavesdropping and see what they're like." He wandered over and sat down on the arm of a seat and pawed slowly through the magazines in a rack.

One of the men, overweight and without the hair he'd once had, was nudging his friend in the ribs and pointing at the pictures in a colorful brochure. "Hey, Ed, how do you think I'll look as Caligula or Caesar or Tiberius or one of those other Roman dudes?"

Ed looked at him and pursed his lips. "About how you looked when you dressed up like a woman for the club frolics."

"Jesus, Ed, I was drunk that night! And it was for charity."

Ed snorted. "And you don't plan on drinking in Roman World? Come on, Al . . ."

Al shrugged. "Well, hell, what's the point of going and spending all that write-off money if you don't have fun?"

Ed nodded, a smile on his lips. "Indulgent joker, aren't you? You really think the tax boys will let us write off a trip to Delos?"

A leer crossed Al's face. "Sure, sure. Bob Kerr, over at Tri-State Soyabread, he went there and wrote it off and the I.R.S. didn't blink an eye." He looked around conspiratorially, saw Chuck, but ignored him as the reporter seemed immersed in a copy of *Delos Highlights.* "Listen, Delos can help you out. They got this service see?" Again he looked around, grinning. "You know that form you filled out before you came? They got this computer that will match you up with anyone in the same field, in a *related* field, or even in some field you don't even think about, but with which you can wangle a connection."

"How am I going to do that?"

"This *service,* man. They are really slick. Listen, they don't *advertise* it, for God's sake, but it's there. You're in wind-power machinery, right? Okay, so anyone in energy production you can have a conference with, right? Or metals? Meteorologists?" He settled back. "See how it works? If *you* can't make a connection, *they* can. Provide you with some pretty good info on how to write it off." He made an expansive gesture. "Hell, you might make a *deal,* too, for that matter!"

Ed nodded again. "It certainly must increase the potential of people that can come to Delos. At their prices, you *need* to write it off!"

Al smirked again. "Hell, ol' buddy, you 'n' me *know* we'd be able to figure a way to write it off. Why give Uncle any more money than we need to, huh?"

"But getting a written-off vacation isn't why you came, is it?"

Al's smirk slid again into a leer. "Hell, no. For that I coulda gone to Bermuda or Hawaii or someplace." His eyes slid around again.. "But *they* don't offer no super deals like Delos, nossir." His finger stabbed at the brochure again. "Lookit that, Ed. Isn't that *something?"*

Chuck craned his neck and saw a voluptuous brunette in a skimpy Grecian-style chiton, standing at two high, ornate doors, gesturing for the viewer to enter. Beyond was the impression of an immense orgy: writhing bodies, servants, wine, food, Roman couches, columns, dancers, musicians, men in togas, and so on. But no bared breasts, no naked loins. Everything was there, but discreetly hidden. An arm just happened to cross between camera and bosom, a potted plant or Senator's shoulder between bared loins and viewer. Discreet, but it told its story.

Al sighed again and pointed out several more well-built female figures to his companion. "Always wanted to get in on one of those Roman-orgy things." His friend nodded agreement. "Started back when I was a kid, y'know? Those movies . . . *Ben-Hur,* the deMille epics, *The Fall of the Roman Empire,* all those Cleopatra films, some of those Italian musclemen flicks, remember?" Ed nodded again. *"The Egyptian, Samson and Delilah, Messalina, Quo Vadis?* Jesus, there were some great scenes in those pics!"

"So that's where you're headed?"

Al nodded eagerly. "Nowhere else, man. Forget that Futureworld stuff. Who cares what happens tomorrow? It's *today,* man!"

"What about Spa World? They're supposed to be pretty good."

"Oh, sure, I thought about them. Maybe next time. No, it's Roman World for me, no doubt about it. Listen, you know Mike Jacobson? He was in Delos for three days and he had to take a week's vacation to rest up after. No kidding. Said it was fan-frigging-*tastic!"*

*"I* was thinking of sort of wandering around and sampling each section," Ed said.

Al shook his head. "C'mon, try Roman World with me first. Then if you wanta travel on, okay." He shook the brochure again, pointing at a buxom blonde bath attendant. "How about that one . . . or one like her? I heard they are programmed to . . ." He looked around, then started whispering to his companion.

Chuck got to his feet and went back to Tracy and sat down with an exhalation of breath. She raised her eyebrows at him in question and

he grinned. "Middle-class hedonists— No, correction. Middle-class *would-be* hedonists. Seven-year-itch stuff."

Tracy frowned. "Sexist, you mean."

Chuck nodded. "Oh, definitely. Isn't that one of the great hidden purposes of Delos?"

"That's what we are going to find out."

"Isn't it obvious? I bet they play to the feminine half of that sexism just as hard. Wait and see. I've heard things." He paused. "Uh-oh, here comes your friend."

Tracy looked up and an expression of disgust and annoyance crossed her face. Approaching them was Ron Thurlow, who had boasted to everyone present of his winning The Big Bundle. It was obvious he had stowed away quite a few complimentary cocktails and was really feeling good about the whole world—and especially his wonderful self.

"Heyyyy, Miss Ballard!" he said with heavy and somewhat blurred delight. He stopped before her, swaying slightly, and spoke in a slurred voice. "Listen, you *got* to put me on your show. No foolin', I'm a real angle, you know." He glanced at Chuck, focused on him, then dismissed him. His feet crowded in between Chuck and Tracy. "Excuse me, fella," he said as he started to zero in on the well-known television personality.

Chuck grinned wickedly as he rose from his seat, gesturing down at his vacated chair. "I was just leaving." He clapped the tipsy passenger on his shoulder. "Anyway, I *know* Miss Ballard loves to get close to her viewers." He peered into Ron's face; the man drew his head back and stared at Chuck with a little confusion. *"You* don't read, do you, Ron?" Chuck asked.

The drunken contest winner shook his head vigorously, as if denying a social disease. "Naw, naw—I'm a tube freak."

"Right," Chuck said and slapped Ron's shoulder again, grinning down at Tracy.

She stared at him with a hard look in her eye. "Thanks, pal!"

Chuck held up his finger. "News is the peep show of misery," he said in a "quoting" voice. "News is literature in a hurry. News is everything that can happen to you and anything you repeat." He looked down at Ron Thurlow, who had dropped heavily into the seat next to Tracy. "Know who said that?" he asked.

"Huh? I thought you said it . . ."

"No, a favorite of yours said that, one of the most quoted persons ever." He looked brightly at Ron, as if waiting for an answer.

"Uh . . ."

“Anonymous said it,” Chuck offered with a wide smile, as if that explained everything.

“Oh, uh, yeah,” Ron said. “I always like Ann’s stuff.”

The reporter spread his hands to Tracy, who was looking daggers at him, and bowed slightly. “Take your cue, Miss Ballard.” He turned away toward Takaguchi as Ron heaved himself closer to Tracy.

“Who is he, anyway?”

“He’s a winner, too,” she answered.

Ron’s eyebrows went up and he peered narrowly at Chuck’s retreating back. “Oh? ‘Million Dollar Dream’? ‘Fifty Grand Pyramid’? ‘National Bowling Champeens’?”

“No,” Tracy replied, still angrily looking at Chuck, who turned to give her a wicked grin as he sidled between an Indian and a Nigerian. “He’s the ‘Smart Posterior Award’ winner for this year.”

“Yeah? Well, anyway, look . . . Here’s the angle.” He hunched toward her. “I’m a common-man type, but now I’m a big winner. That makes me news, right?”

Tracy sighed and turned to him reluctantly. “The thing is, Ron, I won’t be back with a video crew for a couple of weeks. This trip is just research, get the feel of the place, look around, figure out what we want to shoot without having an expensive crew standing around.”

The drunken man shook his head. “Oh, yeah? That’s too bad!” He glanced around to see if anyone was listening and hunched even closer. “Say, you know what this guy told me? He says after you make it with a *robot* chick, that’s it!” He showed a wide, lecherous grin as he straightened up. “You don’t never want nothing else!” He held up his hand and assumed a somber expression. “Swear to God. That’s what he told me.” He looked at Tracy. “You gonna do that?”

“Do what?”

Ron gestured, slopping a few drops of his drink, almost shouting his whispered question. “Have sex with a robot?”

Tracy blinked and looked very uncomfortable. “No”

Ron leaned closer and winked knowingly. “Oh, sure, I understand. You’ve got to be careful with the image.” He leaned in again and Tracy quickly righted his drink before it sloshed on her. “Listen, I won’t tell nobody,” he leered.

Tracy felt like sinking through the seat. Several nearby passengers were looking at them both. A hostess appeared and bent over to touch Ron Thurlow’s arm.

“Excuse me, sir. Will you return to your seat? We are starting our descent.”

“Sure, sure.” Ron heaved himself up, caught his balance with an

outstretched hand to the cabin wall, and gave Tracy a big wink. “Good huntin’,” he leered.

Tracy was not quite enough in control to remove the stiff blankness from her face and replace it with casual unconcern. She fumbled for her seat belt as the forward television screen lit up. Outside the windows at her side the view was black, and streaked horizontally with rain, but the view ahead—by means of the filtering, special television cameras—was a perfect view of the oncoming lights of the landing field.

The pilot’s voice came over the loudspeaker. “We will be landing at Salahari International Airport in approximately six minutes. Passengers for Delos will find special arrangements to conduct them directly to the resort. All others will proceed through customs and immigration.”

The plane was in an obvious descending flight path. A number of navigational symbols appeared in red at the edge of the screen.

“Now please fasten your seat belts,” the pilot continued, “and observe the No Smoking sign.”

The multiple lines of dotted brightness drew closer.

• • •

The glass tunnel was divided down the middle. The passengers for Delos were striding easily down one half of the tunnel, idly observing those queued up at Immigration and Customs at the other side. All this could be seen easily in the monitor room, where banks of television screens provided most of the illumination.

A technician touched some controls and a remote snooper camera swiveled on its base, zooming in on several different passengers until it stopped on the blocky figure of General Karnovsky. The technician punched a button and the image froze. A low-line super-imposure appeared across the screen, letter bv letter:

K-A-R-N-O-V-S-K-Y . . . S-R-0-0-7-2.

The technician thumbed the switch that activated his throat mike. *“Begin gross studies on a mark at twenty-three fourteen.”*

There was a beep, and the camera automatically tracked Karnovsky.

• • •

The sleek white tram swerved along the curving corridor and silently stopped on the red carpet of the brilliantly lit tunnel. Chuck and Tracy stepped down from the vehicle, along with other passengers from the jetliner. Before them was a set of double doors and a pretty,

uniformed attendant, who graciously gestured them in.

The doors hissed open and Chuck followed Tracy into the vast interior of Delos Reception. It was a multi-tiered, brightly carpeted space that rose five stories to a huge metal abstraction in gold and steel wire that spread across the large ceiling in a multi-linear explosion. The room had sections of wall color coded for the different Worlds within Delos. Young hosts and hostesses met the passengers and guided them to the appropriate level. Chuck sensed the massive wealth and size of the Delos operation. Everything seemed incredibly organized and efficient.

His head came up as the public-address system made an announcement.

*"Ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to Delos, the most unique resort in the history of mankind."*

Chuck winced at the use of "most unique." It was the usual devaluation of language. Something is either unique or it ain't. It was like saying "a little bit pregnant."

• • •

In the monitor room, the same technician punched a button and an image of Chuck Browning froze on his TV screen. A low-line superimposure similar to that of General Karnovsky danced across the screen:

B-R-O-W-N-I-N-G . . . S-R-0-0-7-3.

*"Begin gross studies . . ."* followed by a beep . . .

The technician next to him swiveled his monitor, zeroing in on the woman accompanying Chuck.

B-A-L-L-A-R-D . . . S-R-0-0-7-4 appeared on his screen.

*"Begin gross studies . . ."* and the same beep.

• • •

*All guests will please proceed to the appropriate color level for costume and fittings. Guests journeying to Roman World are directed to the yellow level. Medieval World, the green level. Spa World, the blue level. And Futureworld guests are directed to the orange level. Thank you . . ."* After a slight pause, the speaker began again: *"Mesdames et messieurs. Bienvenus à Delos . . ."*

The message continued smoothly in several languages.

• • •

A technician in the monitoring room angrily swiveled his camera. He

had almost missed the Nipponese.

An image of the visitor froze on the screen and his identification followed:

T-A-K-A-G-U-C-H-I . . . S-R-0-0-7-5.

*“Begin gross studies on a mark at twenty-three fifteen.”*

Then came a beeping sound, and the camera continued to track the Japanese man, zooming in on his right shoulder, then his left foot . . . as he strode down a corridor with his party.

The technician glanced over at a red-headed senior technician whose eyes had narrowed to mere pinpoints. “All right, sir?”

The older man nodded pensively.

• • •

Takaguchi and his party came to the green-carpeted level of Medieval World, along with others from the plane who had chosen this section for their vacation.

A middle-aged businessman from Palm Springs, California, raised his eyebrows as he looked around. “You be careful with those wenches,” his wife warned.

He patted her arm but kept his eyes darting from the robot in elegant medieval armor to the bosomy young girls. “Now, mother, I’ll be too busy jousting to think about the ladies.”

She looked sour but resigned. “There’s no fool like an old fool.”

“I’ll be careful,” he promised absently, looking eagerly ahead.

• • •

Al and Ed went quickly to the yellow-carpeted Roman World section, where they were greeted by two smiling hostesses. Each of the businessmen put an arm around a slim waist.

“Hot damn!” Al said. “They do feel just like the real thing.”

“Only better,” laughed Ed.

The two girls dimpled and whispered into the ears of their companions. Both men guffawed and grinned widely at each other.

Al said, “Hot damn, *that’s* something I’ve waited half my life for a dolly to say!”

“We’re here to please,” his voluptuous hostess responded.

“Oh, you do, honey, you do!” Al looked around at Ed. “And to think I learned some eye-talian for this! De gustibus non est disputandum!” He pointed at the girl, then himself. “Amici per la pelle?” She nodded happily and kissed him on the cheek.

“C’mon,” Ed said, “let’s get suited up for this here or-gee!”

• • •

On the orange-coded Futureworld level Ron Thurlow, still slightly high from his free airline drinks, had his arm around a young hostess. He pulled her tightly to his side, grinning foolishly as he looked her over. “Man, you are some kind of machinery!” he marveled. “Them girls in Futureworld as pretty as you?”

“We come in all shapes and sizes, sir,” she said, polite but warm. “Whatever you desire.”

Ron laughed and caressed her boldly. “Honey, you’re perfect!”

Smiling, but in a serious voice, the hostess said, “No, sir. I’m a six hundred. I still have a defect in my hand.”

Ron looked her over boldly. “Where?” he asked with a frown.

She lifted her hand and Ron saw a seam running along the edge of it.

“Aw, hell, honey,” Ron said, pulling her back. “No one’ll ever look there!”

• • •

Tracy and Chuck were circling the large model of the Delos resort, looking at it critically, trying to orient themselves for present and future activities. A huge plastic bubble covered the model, which had Central Control Complex at its focal point. A small plastic sign announced, in red, YOU ARE HERE, and was fixed atop the Complex dome. Radiating out from Central were tunnel-like spokes. One went out of the model entirely, leading to the Salahari Airport, and five others went to each of the five worlds that comprised the Delos resort.

Chuck pointed at the wheel-like complex of domes, grounds, support buildings, and other areas. “Well, Duffy wasn’t lying about one thing. This place must be three times larger than the old one.”

Tracy grinned. “My mouth is dry just thinking about all the pictures I want to get.” She glanced up at Chuck. “Arthur’s so damn cautious. I told him we should bring a crew with us.” She sighed. “Well, I suppose it would be a needless expense, but . . . well, you hate to lose a good shot.” She indicated some of the wealthy and important people who were looking over the model with them. “You never can tell when a good shot will turn up!”

Chuck pointed a thumb at the model. “Where do you want to start?”

“Futureworld,” she answered immediately.

Chuck grinned down at her. “What’s the matter with Roman World?

Now *that* was a time!" he purred dramatically. "Gladiators, beautiful slaves, an orgy every Tuesday whether you needed it or not. The days of Rome, when men were men—"

"And women did what they were told," Tracy interrupted quickly. "No, thanks. I'll stick to the future." She saw Duffy approaching them with a smile on his face. "Anyway, when I was a kid I always wanted to be an astronaut."

"And so you shall!" Duffy couldn't have been more enthusiastic as he overheard her last words.

Chuck turned toward the Delos representative. "Hello, Duffy."

They shook hands. "It's all set," Duffy said to them. He gestured toward the orange level and said, "A day or two in Futureworld and then you'll come backstage with me and see the hardware behind the magic." He smiled warmly and added, "Of course, at any time you're free to go where you wish."

"No restrictions?" Chuck asked, watching their host closely.

Duffy smiled tautly. "Well, for your own safety we can't have you wandering off just anywhere. But whatever you want to see, we'll be happy to show you."

Chuck's smile was lopsided. "That'll be quite a change from the last time I was here."

Duffy's smile was wise and honest. "Mister Browning, you are a prize, indeed. Miss Ballard has all the viewers, but you, of course, are still the rabbi."

"He's a what?" Tracy asked, not certain she had heard correctly.

"Figure of speech," Duffy said, indicating they should walk in a certain direction. "If the cynical and keen-eyed Mr. Chuck Browning tells the world New Delos is kosher, everyone will believe him." He chuckled. "What better advertising could we have?"

Duffy indicated the Futureworld entrance. "Now you'd best get suited up. We have blast-off scheduled in half an hour . . ." He grinned at Tracy. "And you, Miss Ballard, are commander of the flight!"

Tracy's eyebrows went up but her smile was infectious. "I *am?"*

• • •

In the Men's Dressing Room of Medieval World, Takaguchi and his party of businessmen were trying on suits of armor. The walls were almost nothing but cabinets for accessories, with mirrored fronts so that the customers could see themselves being fitted. Robot attendants served as tailors while others pushed small carts piled with polished suits of armor.

The robots appeared indistinguishable from humans, except that they were far more polite and obliging.

A robot dressed as a medieval page entered and crossed to the samurai-sworded Takaguchi. The robot bowed, then addressed himself to the distinguished Oriental. “I’m sorry, sir. I checked with Control as you requested and it is impossible for you to use your father’s sword.” The page bowed as he said, “We’re so very sorry.”

Takaguchi bowed back without the slightest trace of embarrassment. In Oxford-accented English, he replied, “Quite right. I understand. Your weapons must, of course, be very special.”

“Most understanding of you, sir,” the robot said. “I mean no criticism of our guests, but some do not seem to comprehend our particular problems. We do appreciate your understanding, sir.”

The Japanese businessman bowed and put out his arm for other robots to fit him with upper-arm protection. Nearby, in a booth, a bright flash indicated that another Delos customer had been scanned for size and shape, and his exact measurements were immediately transported to the wardrobe department.

• • •

In the reception area just outside the Men’s and Women’s Dressing Rooms of Futureworld, several space-suited guests were chatting, stealing glances at themselves in the mirrored panels around the orange-carpeted room. Enormous color transparencies of distant galaxies, hazy nebulae, comets, Luna, and floating space stations were back-lit and seemed like windows into space.

Ron Thurlow was talking to Mrs. Reed, the woman from Palm Springs, who had anxiously told him her husband was in Medieval World. The Big Bundle winner grinned at her, then quickly changed his expression at her look. “Oh, he’ll be fine. Can’t hurt himself, y’know.”

“I’m really very nervous,” Mrs. Reed said, plucking at her silvery spacesuit.

Ron guffawed. “Nothing to *worry* about! It’s just a monkey suit.” He caught a glimpse of himself in a mirror and posed with chest out, unabashedly admiring himself. “Hey, I look pretty good, y’know?”

Mrs. Reed nodded absently and drifted away. Ron did not notice. Tracy came out of the woman’s dressing room and saw Chuck, who was suited up and admiring a huge, window-sized transparency of the Sirius section of the sky.

“How do I look?” she asked the reporter.

“Just fine,” he said, but before he could add anything a handsome

man appeared in a doorway. Chuck sensed at once it was a robot he was looking at and the figure's first words authenticated the impression.

"Ladies and gentlemen, if I may have your attention, please?" The smile was wide, polite, and revealed twin rows of perfect teeth. "My name is Eric and I will be your guide into Futureworld." A murmur rose from several of the older women present, but Eric continued smoothly: "Now if you will follow me, we will take the tram to the launch area." He gestured toward the portal with a slight bow and the group started forward. "Please stay with the group and do exactly as you are instructed." Before the visitors got to him, Eric turned and went through the door, saying, "Now if you will follow me."

The guests filed out and went down an escalator to the tram station, just as a three-car shuttle filled with tired but happy guests in medieval garb arrived. Chuck watched the medievalists stagger off the tram, some quite drunk, some tired, some somewhat battered, some chattering, some silent. The young reporter stepped onto the tram and sat down next to Tracy. Immediately, his eye was caught by a branching service tunnel, where technicians and service personnel drove small electric cars in their ceaseless, twenty-four-hour maintenance duties of the huge robotic playground. Then the tram started out smoothly and they were going down a brightly lit tunnel, with sleek white-plastic walls. The speaker in each tram car began a recorded message.

*". . . Those of you who have chosen Futureworld are en route to the Aries II space shuttle, which will take you to a rendezvous with the Voyager Starship now in orbit. Aboard the starship you will be able to walk in space and on the surface of the Moon. You will ski the Martian ice caps, ride an asteroid, and experience all the thrills of deep space."*

Chuck leaned toward Tracy and whispered, "Including vertigo, acrophobia, agoraphobia, terminal sunburn, and—"

"Oh, shut up!" Tracy hissed.

Chuck grinned. "Brought to you by White Knuckle Spaceways—!"

Her glare was diamond-hard.

"Ooo! Zapped by the Video Queen!" Chuck groaned, clutching at his chest.

The tram slipped through the tunnels, past colorful doors with letter and number designations as well as DO NOT ENTER signs. Delos personnel, colorfully garbed were almost uniformly attractive, well-built, and neat. Then the little electric train crept to a halt before a wide blue door flanked by more charming, smiling, efficient Delos attendants.

Getting down from the tram, they entered the blue door, which

hissed open pneumatically, and boarded an elevator. The pressure and time elapsed told Chuck they had risen quite a distance before the elevator came to a smooth stop. The door slid back, revealing a lighted area. Eric stepped out and lead the way toward a massive blue door which began rising as they approached.

They heard the faint hum-whistle of heavy machinery and smelled the delicate odor of machine oil. Under the still-rising door they passed, and into a massive, high-ceilinged room dominated by a hatch that was high enough to admit a rocket. The giant, round door hummed and began to swing open as they approached. Chuck had to admit that it was impressive: the door or hatch or port was thick, heavy, well-constructed, and the machinery that moved its tremendous weight was immense.

A P.A. system buzzed *". . . We are at T-minus-eighteen and counting. All systems are in a Go status."*

Chuck lingered behind the others moving toward the giant airlock door, his eyes noting and cataloguing, his ears listing the sounds and dialogue, his nose sensing the tang and ozone and oil.

"Come on," Tracy said with faint irritation.

• • •

Duffy entered the Delos Master Control through a side door. His eyes went at once to the large color-television screen that dominated the room, ignoring the banks upon banks of satellite screens manned by serious-faced operators. The room was a maze of control panels, screens, banks of colored buttons, vernier dials, and other control equipment. The only sound was a babble of technical dialogue proceeding from the controllers to various monitors, subtechnicians, and other operators of equipment.

Duffy crossed the darkened room toward the big screen, his eyes focused on its image and not observing any of the scenes from the various parts of Delos shown on the subsidiary screens. He stopped behind the main controller and put his hands upon the back of his seat.

On the big screen was a wide shot of the passenger compartment of the rocket in Futureworld. Tracy, Chuck, and others began filing into the round, rather spartan interior and taking their seats. Duffy then moved to a side screen, where a series of monitors, arranged in banks, were showing different areas of Spa World.

In one monitor several young men and women were leading the elderly Karnovskys through the "Magic Garden" area, where lovely flowers and lacy trees made a fairy-like atmosphere over velvety-green lawn and mosaic walks. The smiling attendants directed the Russians toward a pool of remarkable blackness, a basalt-edged small lake of mirror-smooth water. Around the edge of the pool, reflected in its still waters, stood two young women holding golden goblets. The faintest of mists wandered through the trees and flowers, softening everything into a somewhat unreal atmosphere. The two elderly Russians walked along the pool, looking into it, then stopped near the goblet-bearing duet.

A technician near Duffy spoke. *"We will begin the golden-goblet sequence on my mark. Three . . . two . . . one . . . Mark!"*

The young men and women began to dance around the elderly Soviet general and his wife, bringing them to the very edge of the pool. The two young women came to them, graceful and smiling softly, but solemnly extending the golden goblets.

The Russian couple took the goblets, turning to smile at each other, then clinked the containers together. Each drained the contents of the golden vessel.

The attendants then took the goblets and the two Russians clasped hands and looked down into the dark water, where they saw the

foreshortened reflection of themselves, aged and stocky, wrinkled and gray.

Nevertheless, as they stared, their reflections shimmered and rippled as though the water was disturbed. When the black pool ceased to ripple, their reflections were that of a young couple. He was dressed in the white, beribboned, bemedaled, gilt-edged uniform of the Tsar's Hussars; she was wearing a beautiful Edwardian gown, trimmed with lace and pearls, crisp and neat, which displayed her figure excellently. They looked at each other, then embraced passionately.

Across the room from Duffy, a technician had monitored his camera to General Karnovsky's right eye. Now he shifted the camera to the left eye. He reached down to the flat front of the console in front of him and made some hurried notes, then panned the TV camera onto the general's nose . . .

Meanwhile, Duffy moved away from the Spa World monitors to those of Medieval World, where knights were suiting up, checking swords and morning-star maces, and fighting. On other screens women were being sung to by handsome troubadours strumming lyres, being embraced by bold knights who carried their colors tied around their upper arms or to their winged, horned, or crested helmets. Duffy glanced back at the Spa World screens, where the young Karnovskys were moving down a path, the youths of the "Magic Garden" dancing around them.

Duffy returned his attention to Medieval World and now saw richly carved doors swing open to reveal the interior of an elevator. Takaguchi and his party of armored friends emerged from the elevator behind the medieval guild. The Control technician pulled back the zoom to show that they were in a medieval street with perfect blue-sky reproduction overhead.

This technician, just below Duffy's position, now muttered into his microphone: *"Begin Saxon-knight sequence on my mark . . . Three . . . two . . . one . . . Mark!"*

Duffy looked at another screen and saw a burly, flaxen-haired knight step out of a doorway. He swaggered onto the cobblestones and approached the party of Japanese businessmen arrogantly. Along the street bakers hurried with baskets of steaming fresh bread, bosomy milkmaids carried wooden buckets of milk in yokes, a tinker ambled along with a great backpack of clinging pots and pans, as well as a pair of bushy-browed woodsmen with axes over their shoulders, a few housewives in earth-colored clothing, and other scene-setting characters.

The knight stopped before Takaguchi and his party, blocking their

way. He sneered at the three men and sniffed. “I smell heathen pig!”

Takaguchi eyed the knight and smiled thinly. In perfect Oxford English he said, “No doubt, sir. You smell yourself.”

The Saxon’s sword hissed from its scabbard and his legs took up a steady, widespread position. His weapon glinted in the artificial sunlight. But Takaguchi’s own blade was out almost as quickly.

The burly knight advanced aggressively onto the much smaller Oriental, but the tiny man’s intensity and verve made up for his size. Their blades met and clashed noisily and the people on the street fled from the scene with little cries, hiding in doorways and peeking out. A few upper windows opened and full-breasted housewives leaned out to watch. A child was snatched back into a house.

The Saxon drove the Oriental businessman back down the street, but a flurry of parries and thrusts brought Takaguchi out of defense and into a brilliant offense. One of his Japanese friends slipped a Nikon from under his cloak and began taking photographs of the action.

“Who authorized that camera?” Duffy snapped.

“No one, sir,” the technician answered. “They were told not to bring them.”

The knight was being driven back. He stumbled over the tongue of a hay wagon and almost fell, but caught Takaguchi’s blade just in time.

“Well, don’t make an issue of it,” Duffy said. “Program the Queen to steal it tonight, expose the film to light in the usual ‘camera failure’ way, and return it to him when he leaves.”

“Yes, sir.”

With a parry that broke the Saxon’s defense, followed by a splendid lunge, Takaguchi skewered his opponent, who expired in a bloody and satisfying manner. The Japanese turned to smile broadly into his friend’s clicking camera.

Duffy stepped to another set of screens, showing a part of Roman World. Al and Ed were being led into a huge bath area, their only garments sheets wrapped around them. Duffy leaned forward and picked up a set of earphones to listen in.

“When do we get to the or-gee?” Al asked, an eager whine in his voice.

“First we bathe,” his female companion informed him.

Without a trace of embarrassment she slipped out of her filmy chiton and stood nude. She gave the gaping human a long look, then walked down into the huge pool, which steamed warmly. She gestured at the businessman and he let the sheet unwrap and drop to the simulated-marble floor.

"Hot damn," he said and waded in. "Oh-oh! It's hot!"

The beautiful Roman girl embraced him warmly and reached for a poolside bar of soap. She began to soap him up and left no area untouched. He giggled and hollered out to Ed.

"Ed! Leave that chicky alone and come in here! Man, this is living!"

Ed unclasped his hands from his companion's generous curves and waded in, naked. His girl splashed in after him. Around the pool other male guests were being bathed by naked girls and all were smiling.

After being carefully washed, Al hung his elbows on the edge of the pool and grinned at Ed. "Think they got a place like this for the women? Hey, honey, they got something like this for the girls?"

She nodded, pressing her body up against Al. "Yes, master, they do."

"Master?"

Her eyelashes dropped seductively. "Yes, master. Aren't you my master . . . ?"

Al's chest swelled. "You betcha, babe! Hey, what is your name, anyway?"

"Claudia, master."

"And yours?" Ed asked his equally ripe-bodied "slave."

"Octavia, my lord."

Ed glanced over at Al. "Say, I think you had the right idea in coming here. I'll try the *other* worlds next trip."

Al laughed. "Right, ol' buddy! Now, hey, when does the or-gee start, Claudia?"

She dimpled, and ducked her head modestly. "Does my master wish to participate in a regularly scheduled orgy, or would he prefer something more . . . intimate?"

Ed interrupted before Al could answer. "Let's do the big affair first, Al! We can always—you know—do the one-on-one thing anytime."

"Yeah, let's get in on the big-time or-gee first!" He slapped Claudia on the rump. "Let's get it on, Claudia, honey!"

Duffy put the monitoring earphones down and moved back to the main screen of the Futureworld level, where Mort Schneider waited for him.

The gaunt, serious-looking scientist looked all of his apparently forty years as he asked, "Is everything all right?"

"Yes, I think so," replied Duffy.

"You spend too much time here," Schneider said, meaning the Master Control room.

Duffy tipped his head toward the big screen. "These people are

important. I don't want anything to go wrong."

Schneider looked especially solemn. "Nothing *can* go wrong."

Duffy gave him an equally solemn look but said nothing.

On the main screen was a long-distance shot of hoses being dropped away from a giant rocket. Nearby, a technician flipped a series of red, green, and white switches and announced: *". . . We are at T-minus-five and counting."*

• • •

"This is an exact replica of the Apollo Command module," Tracy said nervously into the microphone inside her white bubble helmet.

"I know," Chuck confirmed glancing at her.

There were reflections on the spherical surface of Tracy's helmet from the banks of lights and controls. He thought she looked a little panicky and was starting to say something reassuring when Eric popped his head in.

Tracy looked at him and licked her lips. "Am I . . . am I doing all right?"

"You're doing fine," Eric said pleasantly. "Just stay with the program as Chuck reads it off."

He smiled at her and pulled back. The hatch closed behind him with a bonging sound and the dogs began to close down.

Chuck fingered the plastic-covered list in his hand. "Okay, Socks, master cyclinder switch—on."

Tracy looked around, found it, and reached toward it, but her thick gloves seemed awkward. She tried again and flipped the switch. "Got it. What happens if I hit the wrong one?"

"Let's not find out," Chuck said. "I . . . I think this is a game, but"—he looked around; everything seemed absolutely perfect—"but right now I'm not sure." He pored back over the list. "Oxygen release switch—open. You should have a green light."

"Right," Tracy replied. "Got it!"

"You're terrific."

The P.A. system announced: *". . . We are at T-minus-four and counting."*

• • •

Ron Thurlow was strapped into a seat next to an elaborate communications panel. Eric poked his handsome head through the airlock door near him.

"Are you all right?" he asked the rather frightened Ron.

Dry-mouthed, Ron nodded. "Sure," he gulped. "Sure . . . But what do I do?"

"Stay in touch with base or we may never find the starship again." Eric then slapped Ron on the shoulder and said, "Happy landings!" He ducked back out and the hatch closed with a clang.

Ron twisted around as the hatch dogs were closing. "Hey, wait a minute! This is supposed to be a vacation." He looked sick. His eyes roamed the terribly real interior of the cramped compartment. "This does *not* look like the *'Spaceman'* set or even an old *'Star Trek,' "* he mumbled, eyes wet. "I mean, hey, it looks *real—!"*

The radio in Ron's helmet came alive. He heard a few seconds of static, then, *". . . Hello, shuttle, this is Houston Control. How do you read us?"*

Suddenly aware that the lights on his control panel were changing, Ron twisted around to stare at it. He swallowed, and threw some switches. "Hello, Houston, this is me—Ron—Ron Thurlow . . . Hello . . . ? Hello—? Anybody . . . ?" His voice trailed off as he stared at the complex of switches and buttons. "Oh, Jesus!"

• • •

Eric entered the passenger compartment of the big rocket, smiling. Erica, a beautiful female counterpart, was helping the guests get settled into the acceleration couches and making certain they were strapped in. Individual readout screens and a few buttons were by each passenger's seat.

Eric moved along the tank-like room's aisles, checking and double-checking solicitously. The voice on the speaker said, *". . . T-minus-one and counting."*

Mrs. Reed was beginning to have second thoughts. Even though she knew it was all a simulated flight, there was a certain irrevocable aspect that disturbed her. As Eric passed, she reached out to touch him, her voice nervous and shaky. "This is so *real* . . . I—" She gulped and fidgeted, then spoke too loudly. "I . . . I change my mind!"

She tried to rise but the seat belt restrained her. "I want to go to Medieval World!" she wailed loudly, the hysteria rising in her voice. "My husband is in Medieval World!"

Eric said comfortingly, "Nothing can go wrong." Mrs. Reed looked at her fellow-passengers, most of whom smiled back just as comfortingly. The Arab dignitary next to her sympathized, "It is only a simulation."

Mrs. Reed nodded, still trying to rise against the seat belt. "I know,"

she said, “I know, I know . . .” Then she gave up with a sigh and sank back.

The Arab reached over and pressed a button on her console. The screen lit up with a long shot of the rocket. Wisps of white smoke were drifting away from the ship. The picture changed to a shot down through the scarlet gantry at the white, curving side of the rocket.

“See, everything is fine,” the Arab said. He pressed another button and Mrs. Reed saw Tracy and Chuck in the command capsule. “We are almost ready, madam,” the Arab said soothingly.

• • •

In the Master Control room, Duffy was watching Tracy and Chuck closely.

The controller near him spoke softly into his microphones. *“. . . Ten . . . nine . . . eight . . . seven . . . on Grid Five . . . Stand by . . . Stabilize the vibration program . . . Phase nine, activate . . . Stand by . . .”*

• • •

Chuck heard the countdown begin in his earphones. *“ . . . Ten . . . nine . . . eight . . . seven . . .”*

Ron looked anxiously around, as if seeking a way out. He was sweating. *“. . . Six . . . five . . . four . . .”*

Mrs. Reed was gulping, fear in her eyes, her gaze riveted to the small monitor before her. She braced herself and bit at her lower lip. *“. . . Three . . . two . . . one . . .”*

There was a slight pause. *“. . . We have ignition.”*

The whole chamber began to vibrate.

On the monitor they saw white vapor spouting from the cone-shaped rocket tubes. Then flame gushed from the tubes and the rocket began to rise.

• • •

Mort Schneider watched the screens with the rocket rising, then turned and slipped quietly out through a side door. He emerged from Master Control into a well-lit hallway, featureless and bare, and started walking briskly. Turning a corner, he confronted a red security area where two large, muscular guards stood outside a metal door. Without a word, one of the guards opened the door to the Red Room for the gaunt Schneider and passed him in.

The guard’s manner was precise, and when he reassumed the position by the entry he was motionless. No shifting of feet, no

nervous or involuntary blinking, no casual movements. He was totally still.

Within the security area the only light was red, except for that coming from many television screens. Here, the technicians worked even more quietly than those in Master Control. Sitting before their monitor banks, they worked the buttons, dials, knobs, and switches with great economy of movement. Often their arms would remain outstretched to a control without resting, without moving, just waiting to be useful again.

On four screens were frozen shots of Takaguchi, Chuck, Karnovsky, and Tracy, which had been taken in the Delos reception area. Schneider stepped to a position behind a technician who had Chuck Browning's image frozen on his console screen. The technician was speaking into his microphone in a clear, precise voice.

*"We are at plus three. The baseline studies on Subject Beta-Niner are now complete. We can set up for the first behavioral run on Track One-A."* His fingers punched a swift series of combinations on a bank of unmarked buttons. *"Begin thermal study . . . now."*

Another image overlay Chuck's face on the screen, a bizarre picture in solarized colors, each substituting for a range of temperature on the surface. *"Subsurface layer One . . . Mark,"* the technician said, and the colors changed to a temperature display just below the skin level.

Schneider's eyes glittered as he surveyed the room. The Red Room was *his* domain. He looked to the left, where a tiny starship was small and bright against the starry night, kept within the frame of the television monitor.

• • •

Mrs. Reed stood at the port, still nervous, but the nervousness was contained by three strong drinks and a little time she had had to adjust. She stared out at the nearby cratered surface of the Moon. Beyond it, almost disturbingly small, was the small, blue, cloud-flecked sphere of Earth. Both moon and planet were set against a backdrop of twinkling stars in an absolutely black sky.

The rich woman from Palm Springs blinked when the first of the space-walking passengers drifted by. Looking at them, unsupported by sane floors or sensible dirt, made Mrs. Reed edgy again. She turned away from the drifting, gamboling, space-struck Futureworld guests and took another look around the big Space Safari lounge. Outside, a satellite, orbiting the Moon, swung by.

The Futureworld guests inside the ship were wearing comfortable jump suits, lounging on futuristic chairs, or sitting at the bar thinking

up and naming strange drinks for the imperturbable robot bartender to construct. The scene reminded Mrs. Reed of a ski resort, with many of the guests lounging, talking, playing games, or romancing each other while a relatively few of them did enjoy the athletic pleasures of the area.

The "space hostesses" were beautiful, neatly uniformed and charming, as well as efficient. Mrs. Reed noted that the hostesses never had to ask what drink went to what guest—a sign of good service in expensive hotels and restaurants all over the world!

The woman from Palm Springs saw Ron Thurlow enter in a yellow spacesuit, carrying brilliant-colored skis. He waved to her and the others, and left by another hatch. There was a burst of laughter at the bar as someone named a drink of tomato juice and vodka a "Martian Bloody Xenomary"! Other drinks Mrs. Reed had heard named in the last few minutes—all of them remembered by the bartender—were an "Airlock Oiler," "Hot Buttered Jetfuel," "Bug-eyed Martini" (with two stuffed olives), "Spacewalk Fizz," "Old Oxygen," and a "Manhattan Project."

She moved away from the port and sat down next to the Arab dignitary who had been so nice to her on the rocketing up. He nodded pleasantly and brought her into the conversation he was having with several of the other guests about the ultimate future of computerized simulation.

Nearby, Chuck and Tracy were seated opposite each other over a large game table. A chessboard floated against the black of the game arena.

Chuck spoke. "Okay, lady. My knight to your pawn."

He pressed two buttons on a console facing him at the edge of the table. Below, in the black pit of the game arena, his knight—a tiny robot—moved out and, in a few swift blows, killed the pawn. The knight resumed his erect position and the pawn faded out.

Tracy made a face. "All right, you yellow dog," she muttered at the knight. "You have lived long enough. My castle to your knight."

"Rook!" Chuck murmured as she punched two buttons and the castle began to roll forward, the red archer in its crenellated top coming to life and stringing an arrow. "You'll never take him alive," Chuck said in a gangster voice.

But the red castle kept moving and the archer took aim and put an arrow into the chest of the black knight. Chuck groaned and grabbed at his chest as if it were he who had received the shot from the longbow. "Damn!" He gave a fiendish laugh. "Never mind. You are now in my trap!"

His fingers deftly punched out a moving code and his black pawn

moved forward to attack Tracy's red pawn. The black pawn pulled out a dagger and stabbed the red, who fell and faded out. "Gotcha!" Chuck barked triumphantly.

"You poor fool," Tracy cackled in a Macbeth-witch voice. "While you were playing with pawns, my knight has measured your bishop for a shroud." With a grand gesture she pushed two buttons.

The red knight's horse rose in the air, its forelegs waving; then it pranced forward. "Go, Sir Knight!" Tracy said gaily. "For Tracy and Saint George!"

Chuck put his hand over his breast and reacted in mock horror. "Kill a priest! Madam, you have no honor!"

The red knight struck down with his sword and killed the bishop. "Right!" Tracy said smugly.

"Well, I shall attack from a *totally* unsuspected direction," Chuck said with exaggerated craftiness. "The result of clever espionage. Four aces and two baskets—!"

Before he could act, the public-address system caught their attention with another announcement.

*". . . Your attention, please. Tomorrow's first Moonwalk will be at Zero Eight Hundred hours. Space shuttles depart promptly from docking hatches Two and Three at Zero Seven-Thirty. The Martian ski shuttle is now ready for departures at Docking Hatch Seven."*

• • •

Al looked over at Ed from his couch. "Hey, did I steer you right or did I steer you right?"

Ed lifted his head from Octavia's lap, gulped down the grape she had just fed him, and grinned. "Senator Al, you did all right."

Al idly caressed the bare body of his voluptuous Claudia. He looked around the big chamber filled with festive shouts, rutting couples, trays of spiced food, and discarded garments. "Oh, man, if Bea could see me now!"

"Who's Bea, master?" Claudia asked.

Al looked momentarily embarrassed. "Uh . . . my wife . . ."

"Do you think she would enjoy a visit to Delos, master?"

"No!" He looked nervous. "I mean, well, yeah. But not like this. I mean, well, you know . . ." Claudia looked innocent and raised her eyebrows in a silent question. Al took a sip of his wine from a golden goblet. "Uh . . . well, you know . . . I mean, women aren't like men and—"

"You can say that again, Al!" Ed mumbled, his voice muffled by

Octavia's generous bosom.

Al smiled nervously. "Uh . . . yeah . . ." His eyes flicked to Claudia, who was waiting respectfully for his answer. "Well, maybe you wouldn't understand. I mean, you know, you're not, uh, you're not exactly—"

"She ain't human, Al . . . But you couldn't tell it by looking—or feeling!" Ed grinned, suiting his actions to his words.

Octavia giggled.

"Yeah, uh . . ."

"But we *are* programmed to understand most human problems, and those between a man and his wife are quite common, master . . . Perhaps the most common."

"Sure . . . Well, yeah, I think Bea'd like Delos, but maybe Futureworld, huh? Or Medieval World, where she could have a knight as a champion or . . . well, you know . . ."

"Selfish bastid," Ed murmured into Octavia's flesh. "Why shouldn't your wife have the same fun you do?"

"Well, uh . . ." Al looked uncomfortable. *"You* know. Because she's my *wife!"*

Ed laughed out loud. "Isn't she human?"

"Well, sure." He glared over at his companion. "What do you mean by that?" He looked suspiciously at Claudia. "They don't let out any of you girls, do they? I mean, like on contract or lease or anything?"

Claudia shook her head. "Oh, no, sir! Why, maintenance alone would be—"

Al ignored her. "What you mean, fella?"

"If your wife is human, Al, she'll have the same feelings you do . . . and you know it. You're just afraid of it!"

*"Afraid?"* Al sat up and shoved Claudia back. "Afraid?"

Ed looked around Octavia's protruding bosom. "Sure! You think she might get more satisfaction out of some male equivalent of Octavia or Claudia."

Al frowned at Claudia. "Do they—I mean, in other parts of Roman World do they . . . uh . . ."

"Do they have Roman studs?" Ed asked with a laugh.

"Yes, sir, they have a number of remarkably handsome companions. They are gladiators, heros, soldiers, and the like. Some are programmed as emperors, as well." Her eyelashes lowered again, modestly. "We are told they are attractive, master, but we are programmed to appreciate a different sort of masculine beauty." She put her hand on Al's overweight body.

He allowed her to pull him back onto the couch. In the noise and frenetic activity of the regularly scheduled orgy no one noticed his troubled expression. Only Claudia heard his muttered words.

"Naw . . . Naw . . . She wouldn't like Roman World . . ."

• • •

"Are there any other questions?" Eric asked the five yellow-suited skiers buckling up in front of him.

Ron Thurlow looked up anxiously. "Are you *sure* we can't get hurt? I got plans for tonight."

The indefatigable Eric smiled reassuringly. "There is nothing to worry about. Skiing on Mars is not very different from Earth. The snow is red, of course, and the gravity Point Three Eight, or slightly more than a third of Earth's, but your skis are designed for that purpose."

"Uh-huh . . ." Ron said without too much enthusiasm.

• • •

The handsome robot was smiling down intimately at middle-aged Mrs. Reed, who was genuinely flustered and not a little guilty. "Oh, but I'm too old for you," she said. She looked around, holding her drink—a "Moonlight Ride"—in front of her blushing face. "I feel so foolish."

"Not at all," the robot said in a smooth voice. "You must remember, I have been programmed for your pleasure. In my eyes you are very beautiful."

Mrs. Reed exclaimed, "Oh, Lord!" and looked gleefully sinful. She looked around again and put down her drink. "I wonder if it's a sin to be unfaithful with a robot . . ."

Chuck stood at a nearby port watching the Martian shuttle move slowly away in utter silence. Distantly were the rings of Saturn, seen quite clearly against the immense backdrop of stars. The reporter then glanced over at the bartender and saw that he was not busy, as most of the guests had gone to watch the shuttle depart, had drifted away to try other games and diversions, or had sneaked off with one of the beautiful or handsome Delos robots.

"Yes, sir. May I get you something?" the bartender asked as Chuck slipped into a padded stool across from him.

"Have you got a pretty good memory bank?" Chuck questioned.

"Yes, sir. I'm a five hundred. We have quite excellent memories. I've already added thirty-nine new drink names to the list."

Chuck nodded absently and dug in his jumper pocket to pull out a

picture of Frenchy, looking sick and asleep, but actually dead. He handed it over to the bartender, asking, “Have you ever seen this man?”

The bartender took the photo and examined it. “No, sir. Is he a guest?”

Chuck shook his head. “No,” he answered with a sigh. “I guess you’d call him inoperative.”

Tracy burst through the hatch from another part of the space lounge and spied Chuck getting up from the bar. She ran over to him, obviously on an energy high—a high she was finding quite attractive. Chuck grinned at her, for she was truly having a wonderful time and the effect was very infectious. She struck a fighter’s pose and started to shadow-box with the tall, brown-haired reporter.

“Come on. You wanna fight?” she growled, thumbing her nose and sniffing loudly. “C’mon, c’mon!”

“Again?” Chuck asked incredulously. “Man, you are the most combative female!”

“Come on, we’re even up.” She danced around again, striking out with several quick punches into the air. “Only *this* time I get the green.”

“Right,” Chuck said, grinning at her enthusiasm.

They then strolled through the bar and into another section of the lounge, where a huge, square glassed-in boxing ring was set up. Within stood two full-sized lower-series robots of the muscular boxing type, frozen into aggressive positions, left glove out, their chins tucked protectively behind their left shoulder and their rights cocked for the knockout.

Eagerly, Tracy jumped up onto the platform on the green-trunked boxer’s side and inserted her hands and feet into circular, red, glove-like controls on either side of the glass “ring.” The blond television reporter urged Chuck to hurry up. “Come on, you Reluctant Dragon! Hurry up there! My man is waiting and ready to go! Killer Ballard’s the name and fightin’s m’game!” She made a few preliminary punches but the robot fighter stood without moving.

Grinning, Chuck stepped up onto the opposite platform and fit his hands into the bulbous red controls. He raised his eyebrows at Tracy to see if she was ready and she nodded. Both assumed the same position as the robots in the ring as several of the guests gathered to watch, including Mrs. Reed and her attentive robot lover.

“Go!” Tracy said and the controls were released.

A bell rang. Tracy immediately punched out and her robot matched her movements exactly. Chuck blocked and they began throwing

punches with a lot of enthusiasm, if not much skill. Tracy landed a good blow and Chuck's robot sagged, but Chuck punched out and got Tracy's fighter in the stomach.

Blow after blow was loosed and struck, but none of the terrible punishment was transmitted from Tracy to Chuck, or from Chuck to Tracy. They were "generaling" a fight, unhurt but feeling frisky. Some of the punches went wild and more than one missed its opponent completely.

Chuck was fighting hard when Duffy appeared behind him. The Delos representative reached out and took his arm. "Chuck?"

He turned to look, in surprise. "What?"

A shout rang out from the crowd and from Tracy. Chuck looked back just in time to see Tracy's boxer land a smashing right uppercut on his fighter. The robot pugilist staggered and went down for the count, which was sung by an unseen voice. Tracy was jumping up and down with excitement. She hopped down from the platform and ran around to give Chuck a big hug.

"I forgive you everything!" she said excitedly. She looked at Duffy with bright eyes. "Did you see him? Did you see that right hand?" She made a swinging fist. *"Pow!"*

Duffy smiled indulgently. "I'm afraid I interrupted, but I think now would be a good time for you to come backstage with me. All the worlds are at full function and you do have limited time." He gestured around, including all of Delos in his motion.

Chuck nodded and stepped down from the fighting platform. "Right. Listen, I forgot something." He started walking off and waved at them. "I'll be right with you."

As he strode away, Tracy began asking specific questions about fighting and bringing in a video crew.

Chuck had crossed the lounge, and addressed the bartender. "Say, bartender."

"Yes, sir?"

"That picture I showed you. I forgot to get it back."

"No, sir," the bartender said. "I gave the picture back to you."

"No, you didn't." Chuck frowned.

"Yes, sir," the robot said decisively.

"You're a liar." Chuck's back straightened and he looked directly into the robot's eyes.

The bartender was imperturbable. "No, sir. I am not programmed to lie."

Chuck angrily picked up a half-full cocktail glass from the bar and

downed a portion of the drink. He stared hard at the bartender. “Well, for a man without a program, you’re pretty damned good at it.”

Duffy came up behind Chuck and asked, “Is something wrong?”

“No,” Chuck said quickly. “It’s okay. I guess I made a mistake.” He turned and started to walk away.

“To err is human . . .” Duffy suggested with a smile.

The reporter threw a look over his shoulder at the bartender, who was gazing after him with a bland face. “That must be it,” he said.

The bartender’s eyes glittered momentarily; then he resumed his polishing of the glasses. When the reporter had crossed the room, the bartender carefully picked up Chuck’s glass, the sides of which were wet with both the beverage and the man’s sweat. Holding the glass by its top lip, the bartender surreptitiously cached it in a tiny tray in the refrigerator behind the bar; then he pushed a button that rang somewhere . . .

Somewhere, below, in the Red Room.

Chuck rejoined Tracy and they followed Duffy to an airlock-type door. A sign on it read danger: ZERO GRAVITY CHAMBER. Chuck noticed that this door, too, was secured with a very special lock of the type he had seen all over Delos. It was of steel, but had a slot instead of a keyhole or combination. Duffy took out a ring upon which hung several stiff plastic cards in different colors and with certain symbols embossed on them. Chuck remembered he had seen others of the Delos personnel using them.

Duffy stuck a card into the slot on the lock and there was a faint hum and a light came on; then Chuck heard a metallic click. Duffy swung the door open.

It was pitch black beyond. “Watch your step. We don’t use this very often,” the Delos representative warned.

They all stepped gingerly into the darkness and Duffy took a flashlight from a clip inside the door, turned it on, then closed the heavy door behind them. The lock hummed and clicked and the tiny light went out. Duffy swung the flashlight ahead of them. “This way,” he said.

They moved forward, finding it a little difficult to keep their balance, for although the floor was quite solid beneath their feet, it was as black as the space around them. This was very disorienting, although Duffy moved confidently ahead.

“it’s hard to believe we never left the ground,” Tracy told him. “I was convinced we were really in orbit.”

Duffy chuckled indulgently. (And politely, thought Chuck.) Then his flashlight glittered off the hatch of another airlock-type door. A

plastic-strip key opened the door and they stepped out into a bright chamber. Blinking from the sudden light, they squinted and looked around as Duffy swung the door closed and locked it.

They were in a large, long workshop, dominated by lathes and other pieces of heavy construction equipment. Nearby, a section of space-shuttle mockup lay open and prop-like. All around were rectangular wheeled carts, which acted as mobile bins for all sorts of things. As Duffy lead them along, they passed carts of swords, and of spears, armor, spacesuits, bubble helmets, maces and morning stars, tall lances, medieval armor, vividly colored costumes, chain mail, Martian skis, a bin of broken lances, and so on.

“This is our shop for sets and props,” Duffy explained. “Naturally they all have to be made to order, and maintained.”

Tracy nodded, running her fingers along a cart full of battered medieval armor. “Now I know why it costs twelve hundred dollars a day!”

Duffy nodded in agreement. “Yes, it’s very expensive, although since all our workers are model four-fifties, it’s not quite as bad as it seems.” He turned to smile back at them. “Robots don’t get raises and there are no unions.”

“Do they ever get a rest?” Chuck inquired.

“Oh, we’re not heartless,” Duffy said cheerfully. “We shut down six hours a night for repair and maintenance. And, of course, our supervisors are *human,* and we have to consider them.”

Chuck nodded, looking around at the immensity of the workshop. He compared its size to the model domes they had seen in the reception area and realized that much of Delos was hidden underground. In fact, there seemed to be much more hidden about Delos than what was visible to the public.

Tracy, Chuck, and Duffy had changed from their Space Safari jump suits into clean uniforms: white smocks, white boots, and a white hoods that covered everything but their eyes. “These are ‘clean room’ uniforms,” Duffy explained, gesturing them on, “and you will soon see why.”

They stepped through another airlock-type door into a very large white room, with an aluminum grid for a floor. Tracy gasped aloud. Standing stolidly nearby was an armored knight, burly and muscular. He was methodically swinging his right arm, repeating a motion over and over again, while a technician—also dressed in white—peered at the knight’s movement critically.

But Tracy’s gasp had been prompted by the fact that where the knight’s face should have been was a mass of electronic circuitry . . .

She and Chuck now saw a line of finished robots, both male and female, standing perfectly still, wrapped in red plastic, ready for pickup. Nearby was a horse, finished and ready, looking like a still photograph of a live equine. A little farther on, the two reporters saw a second horse—on its back, as stiff as death, its belly swinging open like a hatchback to reveal the complexities of its interior: gears, wiring, struts, silent electric motors, capacitors, and so on. Two white-suited men were bending into the open stomach, their hands busy. The horse suddenly neighed, then snorted. The two repairmen straightened, snapped the panel back, smoothed the horsehair over the seam; then one of them pressed a button on a tiny control box hanging from his belt. The horse kicked, rolled, and got to his feet. The groom in medieval garb who had been standing by came over, took the reins, and led the animal out.

"This is the most perfect air you'll ever breathe," Duffy pointed out, taking in a deep breath. "We filter dust particles down to the five-micron level."

Chuck's attention was caught, next, by a female robot lying on a worktable, her fanciful Magic Garden costume opened down the front, unlaced to show her entire torso. She looked just like a lovely, well-constructed woman in deshabille.

Duffy smiled. "You're free to look, but please don't touch anything."

Chuck looked slightly embarrassed, but paused to watch another pair of studious repairmen come to her worktable, lift her stiffly onto her side, exposing a back that was a mass of intricate electronics. Making some adjustments, they then slapped on the back-plate. One of the repair men picked up a gray piece of machinery and ran it over the seam, which disappeared, leaving smooth, flawless, highly realistic skin. The woman sat up, started lacing up her bodice without the slightest hint of surprise or embarrassment. Tracy watched Chuck as the pretty girl finished fastening her clothing, then walked briskly away. Chuck shrugged and looked at Tracy, who made a grimace of sorrow.

A few tables on, a headless male—totally nude and completely equipped—lay supine, a number of wires and tube extensions protruding from his neck like some sort of electronic arteries and bones. Chuck aimed his thumb at the robot and whispered to Tracy, "Just perfect for the liberated female—a sex symbol that won't give you any argument."

She frowned at him and pointed at a nude female on another worktable; the woman's throat had been opened and its interior was being studied by a serious-looking repairman. "And that's your type, I suppose?"

Chuck held up his hand in the Boy Scout salute. "Truce?"

Tracy nodded, somewhat reluctantly, and they continued their tour. A fountain was under repair nearby, and beyond it, two sheep. A repairman was inserting a tape reel into the body of a tiger, who was placidly standing, blinking lazily, watching the insertion into his side. On another table was a pile of servomechanisms being gone over by two young workmen, who were tagging them studiously and making notes.

Further on, a human figure stood erect on a small riser. It seemed perfect—except that it had no skin. Tracy shivered, for the figure was somehow a parody of the human condition. It was naked, not nude; harsh, not pretty; efficient, not human. Tracy hurried ahead, but Chuck hung back, and Duffy watched both Chuck and the workmen. They activated the figure, which moved perfectly normally, turning its head, simulating walking, lifting its arms and so on, but with no skin whatever to hide the pneumatic tubes, the gearing, the blinking switches, the whirring servomechanisms, the braces, struts, and interior structure, the empty plastic bag that served as a food container for those robots that had to eat food in order to appear normal.

"Ah, Dr. Frankenstein," Chuck sighed, "where are you now?"

Duffy frowned slightly. "We don't like that sort of comparison, Mr. Browning, as I am certain you are aware. And, too, I think it is unfair. We are not attempting to construct living tissue, as the ficticious Baron Frankenstein tried, but *robotronic* replicas of various forms of life. And for, may I remind you, the pleasure of our guests."

The reporter nodded in agreement, but his eyes swiveled from the skinless creature to the Delos representative. "But . . . once . . . the comparison was not so distant, was it, Mr. Duffy?"

Duffy smiled wryly and gestured ahead. "See, Miss Ballard is observing our aquatic constructions."

She stood by a table upon which several types of perfectly normal-looking fish were lying writhing, wiggling, and weaving, as though swimming through the water. But there was no water. An attendant picked up a trout as Chuck sauntered along, pressed a hidden catch, and the fish broke into two, swinging open to reveal more electronic wiring. He then pressed a button within the body of the fish and the creature stopped dead. The repairman next unclipped a small wafer covered with imprinted wiring. Setting it down, he picked up a similar wafer from a small bin nearby and inserted it, punched the button, closed the fish, and released it to observe its different rate of swimming.

An electric tractor came by, pulling little padded carts filled with

various objects, including robots. The first cart had three armored knights leaning stiffly against its side. Chuck gave a start when he looked into the dark interior of the helmet, under the lifted visor, and saw a pair of quite human eyes staring at him; the eyes continued to watch him as the cart passed.

The second little cart was filled with quite badly damaged bodies. A man in the uniform of a World War I doughboy had an explosion of wires and tubes that dripped colorless hydraulic liquid. Under him was a Roman centurion with a smashed face that was bloody, but with a plastic tube protruding from the mess. Next to them was a crumpled "Martian" with limp tentacles.

The last cart of the small three-car train held a huge lion, who seemed quite alive, moving his head, and ears and eyes, very realistically . . . except that he repeated the cycle every four seconds.

A Roman senator in a purple-edged toga strode along the aisle between the workbenches, a dagger sticking out of his back. A soldier in the resplendent uniform of Wellington's Black Watch also walked along toward the proper repair bay, his head turned almost completely around. An enormous Cheshire cat, as big as a pony, walked behind on padded feet, its wide smile working only on one side.

On another table a number of flowers were opening and closing their petals while a workman timed their workings with a stopwatch.

Duffy said, "Not every object is a humanoid robot. We have devoted much time and money to detailing everything. Look at this, for example." He pointed at the next table.

Pooh Bear, Eeyore, Christopher Robin, and others from Alan Alexander Milne's stories of Winnie-the-Pooh were in various stages of completion. Duffy indicated several more tables and testing areas in the cavernous Research and Development section. "You see, we're planning a Storybook World," he said with a modest smile. "We already have some of Lewis Carroll's characters working in a subsection of Spa World which we call Wonderland World, but we're going to expand."

"How delightful!" Tracy exclaimed, looking at a Queen of Hearts that was, indeed, paper-thin.

"I'm glad you like it," Duffy said. "We plan it for children, but we're always happy when the adults respond, too."

"Look, isn't that— Look, Chuck, Gandalf!"

Several of the characters from *The Lord of the Rings* stood in a grouping, arguing to themselves, while the tall, dark-robed Gandalf stood in frozen immobility, his robes hiked up over his arm in an undignified manner while an attendant worked on his circuits.

Duffy took the video reporter's arm and led her around a partition. "Delos will never be finished, you know. Never. We're planning an Eastworld, the Storybook World I mentioned, and a number of things I would just as soon keep quiet about now." He smiled at Tracy. "I know you understand. Premature publicity . . ."

She nodded. "Oh, of course I understand." She looked back at the A.A. Milne characters and sighed. "Oh, where was Delos when I was a child!"

"Perhaps this will amuse and interest you now," Duffy said, indicating the worktables in the section before them, where a number of talking animals and plants were conversing with each other and a short, stubby, bland-looking man was talking back to them.

"Dr. Doolittle," a rose complained, "I do wish you'd allow me to have really sharp-thorns. It gives one a sense of protection, you know."

"Doctor, would you speak to the technicians, please?" a dog asked in a sharp, barking voice. "They keep giving me that puppy chow and I'm grown up now!"

"I'll speak to them both," the doctor said, moving along to the next complainant.

"Hugh Lofting's creatures," Duffy said. "And over here . . . Kipling's *Jungle Book."*

Tawny, black-striped tigers . . . chittering monkeys . . . a sleepy hippo . . . a rusty-maned lion . . . a huge snake all coiled . . . sat, stood, or swung on the equipment and the testing platform while a pair of robot technicians ran an induction test on a black leopard with slanted yellow eyes.

A booming voice came over a partition and Chuck peeked around. A little man sat before an impractical-looking amplifying device, thundering out imprecations to a trembling little girl who stood before a curtain.

"Frank Baum," Duffy said in his ear and Chuck smiled.

Toto barked. A tin man rattled. A lion roared, then clapped a paw over his muzzle. A scarecrow jumped behind the small girl and trembled.

"See the *Wizard?"* the man boomed incredulously. "You *want* to *see* the *Wizard!"* He pressed a button and steam shot out into the test area beyond the curtain. His voice echoed loudly. "Shiver me timbers, what's that noise?"

Chuck looked around, and between a computer deck and a gray cabinet marked TRI-THOLENE GAMMA-DELTA 78-890-32 he saw a bristly-bearded pirate scowling at the Wizard of Oz.

“No storybook world would be complete without some pirates,” Duffy interjected. Tracy joined them and they walked over to the huge, beady-eyed, ferocious brigand. He looked Tracy up and down lecherously, but Duffy spoke quietly. “He wouldn’t do that if there were children present.”

“Aye,” the pirate agreed, brushing at his mustache with two fingers. “A trim ship she *is,* too.” He laughed in a great rumbling, coarse, fearsome bellow.

“Come on, let’s get out of here,” Tracy said, forcing a chuckle into her voice. She took Chuck’s arm and whispered, “Some things get just a little *too* real around here!”

They strolled past an uncompleted President Millard Fillmore and a reciting James Buchanan. Harry Truman was sawing the air with his hands and giving them hell.

“You’d be surprised at how many guests want to either tell off a monarch or a world leader, tell him what he *should* have done, or”—Duffy laughed—“or have a picture taken with one!”

A Napoleon was being operated on nearby, and next to him a Fidel Castro was being repaired.

“Looks as if someone shot him,” Chuck remarked.

Duffy nodded, smiling faintly. “People *do* work off some of their personal, religious, or political aggressions here,” he admitted.

Genghis Khan stood brazen and hot-eyed, feet spread apart, his left arm lying on a repair bench. He watched, impassively, as they rewired his circuits.

Duffy indicated the Mongol leader with a tilt of his head. “It’s curious, you know. You have people who want to come in here and save Joan of Arc from the stake—usually right at the last minute!”

“And Kennedy?” Tracy asked.

“Yes . . . but we’re not yet equipped for that. Someday, perhaps, we’ll have a reproduction of Dealy Plaza. In the meantime, they can have quite a nice chat with J.F.K. in the Oval Office.”

“What about saving Christ from the Cross?” Tracy inquired.

“We try to talk them out of that,” Duffy replied. “While we do cater to some . . . um . . . odd tastes.” He smiled at Tracy. “Off the record, of course, Miss Ballard.” She nodded. “But we try not to, um, tamper with known history too much. One more gunfight at the O.K. Corral, one more medieval joust, one more Roman orgy—these are not going to alter history.”

“Unless the customer pays for it,” Chuck suggested.

Duffy smiled diplomatically. “Perhaps. I’m afraid that will have to remain classified information. I’m certain you understand. If people

came here to, well, live out some fantasy . . . they wouldn't appreciate it being splashed all over the media."

Tracy nodded. "We understand, Mr. Duffy, but what about *typical* fantasies? Can you give us any clues as to what might be your most common request?"

"Just what you'd expect, Miss Ballard," he answered smoothly. "You might be surprised at how, uh, plebeian some of the requests for Special Events might be. For example, we have constructed a reasonable likeness of a certain gentleman's mother-in-law. He comes here about once a month and—"

"—bawls her out," Chuck finished for him and Duffy nodded. "What about people requesting duplicates of famous actors and actresses?"

Duffy's smile changed. "I'm certain you will also understand that we could not legally offer duplicates of known and living personalities, Mr. Browning. There might be serious legal consequences."

"Even if you obtained a contract authorizing it?" Tracy asked. She named three famous actresses who would probably boast about the popularity of their robotic look-alikes.

"We have had a number of requests, yes," Duffy admitted, "but we are on much safer legal ground if we, shall we say, utilize historical characters such as Lucrezia Borgia, Cleopatra, Helen of Troy, et cetera."

"Literary, too . . . ?" Tracy queried.

"Yeah, like Fanny Hill," Chuck suggested and Tracy frowned at him. "Or Moll Flanders? What was that waitress called, in *Of Human Bondage?"*

"God, not *her!"* Tracy said. "But Heathcliff, now, or Brian Thorne, Rhett Butler—?"

Duffy laughed. "You see why Delos will always be popular? *Everyone* has some fantasy—general or specific—and *we* can bring it to life for him or her."

"At a price," Chuck prompted.

Duffy shrugged. "Of course. This is a profit-oriented world. These technicians, this equipment, the research . . . it doesn't come cheaply. Even the twelve-hundred-dollar-a-day admission price does not make that much for us, really. Everything gets plowed back into enlarging and developing Delos." He smiled softly. "The investors in Delos do not expect a quick turnover on their money."

"Do *they* come here?" Chuck asked quickly.

"No comment," Duffy answered.

"Do you plan any other additions than the ones you've mentioned already?" Tracy inquired as they moved back into the main aisle and

resumed their walk.

“Yes, but some are quite vague as yet. Perhaps . . . in time . . . we will reopen Westworld.” He gave Chuck a glance and the reporter shrugged.

“With improvements, of course,” Chuck said and Duffy grinned.

“With improvements,” the Delos rep agreed.

“What about a world based upon Dante’s *Inferno,* or some kind of Heaven?” Tracy suggested.

Duffy nodded. “There are so many things we could do. But time, money . . . even energy . . . are all limited. I only have two hands.”

“You could design an assistant with four,” Chuck laughed, but earned a look from Duffy he could not quite comprehend.

Chuck and Tracy paused by a table where a medieval knight lay gutted, not by the sword of a human competitor, but by the deft electronic surgery of three technicians. These bent over the body and one asked, sympathetically, “How’s that?”

The knight responded. “Better, but the last time that went out you put in a Twelve-Seventeen Jay-Six.”

“This is the Jay-Six, Mark Two,” one of the repairmen said.

“I liked the *old* Jay-Six better,” the knight said. “It was original equipment.”

“You’re getting the Mark Two.”

“All right,” the knight replied without rancor.

Tracy looked up at Chuck and lifted her eyebrows. He took her elbow and steered her down the aisle of the huge repair shop. “Painless dentistry,” he muttered.

Duffy urged them on. “There’s still a lot to see,” he said.

• • •

“Kill ’em!” Al roared, and fell back laughing. He waggled his thumb down and yelled it again: “Kill ’em!”

Below, in an arena about the size of a baseball diamond, a slim gladiator, wearing the leather uniform of a retiarius and holding the tips of his trident spear against the throat of a bulky, heavily muscled secutor in armor and wide-brimmed bronze helmet, looked up at the screaming crowd. The secutor lay motionless, his short sword lying in the sand, out of reach. The faster, more agile net thrower had caught the strong secutor, entangled him, tripped him with his trident, and now awaited only the verdict of the spectators before giving the deathblow.

It was always the deathblow. Seldom did the jeering, cheering,

shrieking crowd grant life to the defeated. As Al had said, when the previous gladiator had lost, “Hot damn, Ed, they’re only robots!”

“So are Octavia and Claudia.”

“Yeah,” leered Al, “but they’re up here and those toys are down there.”

“They don’t look like toys,” Ed had said. “They look like the real thing. I wouldn’t want any of them out after me.”

“Death!”

“Kill!”

“Do it!”

“Do it! Do it!”

The yells came from the hundred or so guests who lounged under splendid awnings, attended by obedient slaves. Impassive Roman soldiers stood with spears around the rim of the arena, their body-shaped armor glistening and polished, their red cloaks hung precisely. They moved just often enough, shifting weight and moving their heads, to look alive; but they made no attempt to join the screaming, as did some of their fellow-robots, and the slavegirls and slave-boys in attendance upon the guests.

“Slit his throat!”

“Go on—stab him!”

“Bloodthirsty, aren’t they?” Ed asked.

Al laughed, sweeping up his goblet of wine. *“They?* We, you hypocrite! That’s us up here! They’re just like us. They’re just humans —bloodthirsty humans, the kind that is glad when the *other* guy gets it.” He grinned, and pulled Claudia to him for a rough nuzzle. “Sure, kill the bastid—who cares? They aren’t real. None of this is *real.* It’s *better* than real!” He leaned forward and jutted his jaw out at Ed. “Hot damn, Ed, don’t you get the real significance of Delos *yet?* Jesus, man, don’t you see anything? It’s *better* than real, because there is no *responsibility* attached!”

He waved his hand grandly. “Sure, if I damage one of their fancy toys beyond what they call ‘normal wear and tear’ then I gotta cough up some loot to cover. But so what? You always gotta pay for your fun.” He hugged Claudia again. “You wanna tell these two what we did before we came here to the arena?”

“As you wish, master. My lord and I—”

“Hold it!” Ed said, putting up his hand, palm out. He looked embarrassed. “I can guess.”

“No, you can’t,” Al replied, still smiling but with his eyes growing cold. “You wouldn’t dare try what we did, even with a robot that was programmed not to blabber. Go on, tell him, babe.”

"My master and I tried—"

*"No,* dammit!" Ed snapped. He was flushed.

"Afraid you might learn something?" Al sneered. He took another gulp of wine.

"No, it's not that. It's . . . Aw, hell, Al, what a guy does with a woman is his business."

"That's the trouble with you, Ed, you *still* haven't got it straight *yet.* These aren't woman, they're *robots.* They just look and feel and"—he laughed lewdly—"and *act* like females. But the point is, they *aren't.* No more than your TV set or your car, fergawdsake!"

Again, Al leaned forward as he began to speak, but the crowd screamed as one person and he whipped his head around. "Aw, hot damn, you made me miss the hit!" For a moment he watched the retiarius yank the trident from the bloody throat of the "dead" secutor, and take a short triumphant tour of the arena. Meanwhile, attendants carried off the dead gladiator, pulling him by the heels, his helmet making a wide, shallow ditch in the sand.

Al returned to the subject, but in a more reasonable tone of voice. "Look, ol' buddy, the *point* is they ain't real. But you suspend your disbelief, as they say. Just like you do when you go to the movies. You *know* the cavalry and the Indians ain't having it out up there on that screen, nor nowhere else either with it bein' piped in. Hot damn, boy, don't you see the advantage of all this *yet?"*

Ed bit at the shoulder of his seductive companion and grinned. "I'm beginning to get your point. What we do here—any of us—doesn't matter. We can work off our fantasies."

"That's it. Some want to fly to the stars or be king or something. Fine. Let 'em! Some want to relive their youth or get blown outta their gourds by seeing some sort of dream come to life. You know the type." He hugged Claudia again. "But this here is *my* kinda fantasy. Hot damn!"

A flourish of trumpets sounded and a new team of gladiators entered the ring. They saluted the "Emperor," in his box, then started banging away at each other.

"Hey!" Al called over to Ed. "How do you think Rocky Marciano or Joe Louis or Muhammad Ali would do against one of those guys?"

"All it takes is money," Ed grinned. "And imagination."

• • •

In the Master Control room a technician flipped a switch to the Memoranda Recorder.

*"Alpha-Five-Six-Six-Zero-Gamma. Suggest investigation of staging*

*computerized fights between known boxing champions in addition to existing staged combats. Alpha-Five-Six-Six-Zero-Gamma out."*

• • •

The warm spring wind blew the dresses of the elegantly dressed ladies and fluttered the pennants that hung from the tents of the knights who lined the jousting ground. The entire place had the air of a country fair, hawkers of food, wine, trinkets, and flowers mixed with the gaily costumed ladies and gentlemen. A wandering minstrel played a pretty air. Full-bosomed apple girls sold their fruit with cheerful smiles. A cucumber salesman with a barrel of pickles sitting in a cart was shouting that they cured warts, impotence, ennui, and lighter cases of leprosy. A young man in brown tights and a leather shirt was selling flower crowns from a pole that was strung with them. A burly woodsman was chewing on a meaty pork rib and a number of children ran through the grounds, crying shrilly.

In the beribboned grandstand nobles of the court sat in ornate chairs, waving lace handkerchiefs and laughing at barbs thrown out by a gamboling jester. A flower girl wended her way among the gentry, dispensing blossoms with a smile. Broad-shouldered, dark-bearded men in chain mail and carrying broadswords guarded the entrances to the grandstand.

Booths were marked MEAD, BEER, and ALE—sold to the common folk. And nearby, meat pies were sold hot and steaming from an earthen oven. Cold cider and jam tarts, slices of fruit and hot rum were liberally vended by rosy-cheeked women and bearded men in tunics.

In the knights' tents men were donning armor, swinging test swords, having last-minute adjustments made to helmets, and pulling on gloves studded with sharp bosses. Just outside, spirited horses were being calmed by grooms, draped with brightly tinted fabric, and their tall-backed saddles were being cinched up. The horses were not slim, graceful racetrack-type animals, but were much larger—sturdy and broad—with great-muscled legs and withers, large-toothed and fiery.

In the center of the jousting space two dismounted knights were flailing away at each other with sword and mace, their metallic clashes resounding throughout the tournament grounds.

Reed, the rich visitor from Palm Springs, was fastening the last buckle on his armor and looking up adoringly at the beautiful young maiden tying her scarf about his neck. In formal tones, he said, "It will be an honor to wear your colors, milady."

He stood up as she blushed faintly and curtsied. "And tonight, my lord"—she paused to look around chastely before she smiled intimately and whispered—"I shall give you your reward."

At the sound of trumpets, Reed turned, his chest expanding with excitement. A beautiful white stallion pranced through the tents out to the edge of the jousting ground and Reed smiled as he recognized the Japanese businessman from the plane.

Takaguchi took his helmet from his squire and set it carefully over his head. The horse snorted and the two chargers behind him, carrying the Japanese's armored friends, echoed the snort. As Takaguchi reached for the long lance held in readiness by the squire, one of the Nipponese pulled out his Nikon and began taking photographs.

In Master Control, a technician barked, "I thought the Queen stole that camera!"

Another controller said, "She did. Apparently he stole it back."

The first technician then instructed: *"Begin the joust sequence on my mark. Three . . . two . . . one . . . Mark!"*

A technician on the opposite side of the control room had just panned his monitoring camera on the fingers of Takaguchi's right and left hands. He reached now to a button beneath his console—a small, insignificant button.

It was marked RED ROOM.

The trumpets sounded again and the bright banners hanging from the shining brass horns fluttered in the wind. A heavily armed Saxon knight swung onto his sturdy horse with a clank and reached for the long lance. The weapon had a pennant fluttering from just behind its sharp tip and this snapped loudly in the wind.

The Saxon wheeled, his prancing stallion around abruptly, his eyes glittering out through his raised visor at Takaguchi, who was putting his lance into attack position. The horse reared and wheeled again, charging down the tournament grounds, which had been cleared of the two battered knights.

Reed's horse's hooves vibrated the ground under him as he watched Takaguchi move out into position to face the Saxon.

The Saxon knight, burly and exuding the deadly power of an expert fighter, brought his horse to a pawing and rearing stance; then dropped the horse down. His mailed fist slammed down his visor and his lance swung into position, crossing over from his right to aim toward the left, across the neck of his steed.

Takaguchi rang down his visor. His lance dropped into position and settled in against his side. He gripped it strongly, any expression he might have had hidden behind his helmet's faceplate.

The trumpets blew their challenge and the two knights bolted toward the center with a thunder of heavy hooves.

The Saxon's lance was level and he rode the plunging, pounding beast as though he himself were a centaur, a part of the giant attack animal. Takaguchi's lance bobbled and swayed erratically, yet managed to bang loudly off his opponent's shield and the Saxon's lance just scraped across his. They rode to the end of the tournament grounds, pulling their powerful mounts to a halt. Wheeling, they dug spurred boots into the flanks of their horses and charged again.

Ladies in the grandstand stuffed scented handkerchiefs into their mouths as their escorts cheered mightily. The great steeds galloped toward each other, kicking up clods of the churned field. Takaguchi's lance was better aimed than before, but still it bobbed and canted erratically. The Saxon knight swerved slightly and the Nipponese's lance point dug a deep crease into his enemy's round shield. But the burly, white-skinned knight ticked off a blow to Takaguchi's shield that staggered the Japanese in the saddle.

The horses raced past each other again, their lances swinging low, then coming up high as the two men pulled the snorting beasts to a wheeling, rearing halt. Without a pause the Saxon knight came straight at Takaguchi, lance level and aimed. The Japanese fought his horse around, dropped his lance point, and kicked the powerful animal into yet another charge down the jousting field.

The Saxon was swifter this time and they met closer to Takaguchi's end of the field, but the Japanese businessman's lance was perfectly aimed, tumbling the Saxon from his saddle with a great crash.

The riderless horse ran into the tents, where it was caught and calmed by a quartet of grooms. Takaguchi swung his own horse around, threw his lance from him, and swung down from the saddle. Thumping heavily to the chewed-up field, he almost lost his balance. He drew his sword at once and it rasped noisily from his scabbard. Then the short knight thumbed-up his visor, looked at the Saxon getting groggily to his feet, and slammed it down again.

The Japanese charged him and in a few quick blows "killed" him. The groggy knight put up only a token defense, too battered to be much good against the swings and thrusts of the triumphant Takaguchi.

With the bloody corpse of his opponent facedown in the dirt, the businessman dramatically raised his visor to the cheers of the grandstand. Grinning widely, he accepted the plaudits, not bothering to dodge the thrown flowers that plinked off his armor. He bowed in Japanese style to the applauding spectators and strode off the field—trying hard not to swagger.

• • •

"Do the guests always win?" Chuck queried, pointing his thumb at the screen that showed Takaguchi accepting the congratulations of his friends and at another screen that showed yeomen carrying off the defeated Saxon knight.

Schneider leaned forward, past Duffy, to say, "Oh, yes." He smiled thinly. "We try to make it believable for them," he shrugged. "But of course they are always the victors."

Duffy suggested they move along the platform above the banks of monitoring screens. Chuck and Tracy looked at scenes from all the different worlds and listened to the technical chatter from the various controllers.

*"I'm not getting sound pickup from the tenth quadrant,"* said one technician. *"Please check my leads to the console in A-Twelve."*

The technician next to him began, *"Forty-Eight Ninety at Checkpoint Six-Eff . . . Mark! Begin Orgy, Degree Five, at end of present Intro-Two . . . On my mark . . . Three . . . two . . . one . . . Mark!"*

Next to him a controller was saying into his microphone, "*. . . Yes, he can be the executioner if he wants. The last one was just killed. Check with Costuming and assign a six hundred . . .*"

"*. . . Okay, program the torturerer in Five-Niner one . . .*"

"*. . . The dungeon lighting is Five-Five. Repeat . . .*"

Another controller: "*. . . Caesar won't be repaired until tomorrow. Switch to another scenario. Is Brutus in position? Begin programming Octavia . . .*"

Chuck and Tracy paused before a bank of flickering monitors that showed Spa World. On one screen a fine carriage, drawn by two beautifully matched black horses, was coming down a nicely backlit road. A coachman of the Russian cossack type was driving the spirited animals and in the carriage rode the young Karnovsky with his beautiful wife. He wore a dark uniform with gold frogging and ornate braid and she had a fur-lined hood pulled up around her face. He was pouring her champagne and their legs were covered by luxurious furs.

"Sir," a technician asked, appearing at Schneider's side. He whispered to him and the gaunt senior technician allowed himself to be pulled away. Duffy said, "Excuse me," to Tracy and Chuck and joined Schneider at a console, where they discussed a policy decision.

Chuck pulled Tracy along the railing behind the technician's chairs and glanced back at the figures hunched over a readout screen, punching-in options. She looked at him curiously and he pointed at the screens before him, where some pseudo-Romans were enjoying the

ministrations of some lovely robot women and handsome robot men.

"I want you to do something for me," he said in a low voice.

"What?" She looked up at him with a faint frown.

Chuck put his lips almost in her ear. "I want you to pick one of these nice young men and turn him on."

Tracy pulled back her head and stared at him, smiling in some sort of surprise. "Are you *serious?"*

"You bet." Chuck took another look past her at Schneider and Duffy.

"Why?" She, too, glanced around at the busy technicians.

"For once," he said, emphasizing the words, "just trust me, will you?" He tugged at her sleeve. "Come on, Socks, you know how to do it. Just pick one of these guys and lay that sex appeal on him. Get him *interested,"* he said in a husky whisper.

"What—?"

"Come on," he urged. "You know how. Don't tell me you never used your pretty face to get a wedge into a story." He raised his eyebrows at her.

"What's your game?" she asked suspiciously.

Chuck looked over at Duffy and Schneider, checking their continued occupation. "It's no game, believe me. Will you do it?"

Tracy shook her head. "I must be as crazy as you are." Then she peered around with a little grin. "All right, which one?"

Chuck pointed at a technician at some distance from Duffy and Schneider, and said, "Try him."

They sauntered along the railing, glancing into the various screens, watching the technicians change from one distant peeper camera to another. Chuck remembered that at no time had he seen a lens or camera when they were in the Futureworld section of the huge mechanized resort. "Damned clever, these electricians," he muttered. Then he stopped, ostensibly to watch a bank of screens showing a Roman chariot race, but actually to unobtrusively oversee Tracy's work.

The young video reporter drifted along until there was a break in the observation railing, then she slipped down, and leaned on the console of the young man's controls. Flashing a big smile at the early-thirties technician, her eyes were brightly sending messages. Chuck put a casual hand over his mouth to hide his smirk.

"Hi there! I'm Tracy Ballard." She waited for recognition and got none, so she continued smoothly. "I've been watching you work." Gesturing at the knobs, buttons, dials and other controls she continued, "You really know what you are doing!"

“Thank you,” the technician said.

“What’s your name?” Tracy asked, leaning closer, glad they had changed out of their shapeless “white room” costumes into her own clothes.

“Steven.”

“Well, listen, Steven,” she purred, moving her hip quite close to the seated controller, “I’m going to do a big video special on Delos and I sure could use some help describing all these complicated things you do.” Her eyes were intense, her mouth wide and inviting. “You think maybe later, you know, we could get together and you could tell me about all this . . . ?”

Steven had never taken his eyes from the banks of screens before him after his first look at Tracy and this bothered her. He shook his head. “I am sorry, that is not possible.”

Tracy’s smile slipped. “Are you . . . married?”

“No, ma’am.”

She studied the nice-looking young man. He didn’t seem cold exactly, nor did he act the least bit homosexual. He merely appeared, flatly, to be uninterested, and this piqued Tracy. She edged even closer, draping her arm across his shoulder and bending down to give him a good whiff of her expensive perfume and to admire the fall of her thick, glossy hair, for which she had received many compliments in the past. As she talked intimately into his ear, Steven just continued his work.

“It must be wonderful to have a job like this,” she whispered. “But don’t you get a little . . . lonely sometimes?”

“No, ma’am. *Activate Phase Eight-Twelve-Slash Two, please.”*

“You know, Steven,” Tracy continued, well aware that Chuck was within eavesdropping range, “you’re not making this very easy.” She leaned around, almost blocking his view of the television screens. “Tell me. Do you think I’m pretty?”

“Yes, ma’am. *Bring up the Moon, please. Standard orbiting speed. Prepare to activate shuttle.”*

“Well, I get lonely, too . . . so why don’t you—”

Steven looked directly at her for the second time. “I’m sorry, ma’am,” he said and put out an arm to move her to one side. *“All right,”* he barked into the microphone, *“we will begin the spacewalk sequence on my mark. Bring the Moon up fuller, please”*

Tracy stood up and looked down at the controller, a puzzled frown on her face. Her head whipped around to Chuck, who was watching the Roman scenes on the screens, or seeming to.

Steven started counting. *“Three . . . two . . . one . . . Mark!”*

Tracy joined Chuck again and they drifted along the railing, glancing at Duffy and Schneider, still deep in discussion. She was very annoyed with herself. “You’d better try him yourself,” she said bitterly. “I don’t think he likes girls!”

Chuck tugged at her arm. “Come on!”

“What were we trying to prove?” she asked him as he took her along to another level of monitors. Duffy and Schneider broke away from their discussion and joined them.

“Hey, Duffy . . . ?” Chuck said amiably.

“Seen enough?” Duffy offered with a smile, as if to say: “Technical stuff *is* boring, isn’t it?”

“I’ve seen enough to know when I’m getting the fast shuffle.”

Duffy blinked. “What are you talking about?”

Chuck stuck his thumb at Schneider. “Your friend, Dr. Schneider here, gave us ten thousand words on everything except the obvious.”

The gaunt scientist asked, blandly, “Which *is?”*

The reporter waved his hand around, to include everyone. “What the hell is wrong with the men in this room? I mean, are they drugged or hypnotized or what?” He glared at Duffy. “Because they sure as hell aren’t normal.”

Duffy’s smile was thin and wise. “They are normal for robots.”

Tracy’s jaw dropped. “These men . . . are machines?” She turned again to the men manning the control consoles. “That’s impossible.”

Chuck frowned, looking alertly from one technician to another with his new knowledge. “They *can’t* be,” he protested. Turning back to the two Delos representatives, he said, “What about their hands? Their hands are perfect.” His tone indicated he had caught on to their joke.

Schneider shook his head in self-chastisement. “It seems that I am at fault for not explaining.” His face was earnest and frank. “You see, we discovered that one of the causes for our disaster with Westworld lay with the human flaws of our controllers.” He shrugged, and gestured around them. “So we replaced them with these. The model seven hundred technician series.” He shrugged again. “They have no ego, so they have no hangups . . . Thus, one *more* source of error has been eliminated.”

Tracy and Chuck looked around the room with new eyes. The men manning the consoles *did* seem unusually efficient. They never fumbled for a switch, they never hit the wrong button, their voices were always nicely modulated, and they never panicked or tired.

On the big screen a space ski sequence appeared. As Chuck and Tracy were adjusting their perceptions, the scene changed to the red ski slopes of Mars, where the yellow-suited skiers in space helmets

slashed through powdery crimson snow. The sky was jet black and Tracy thought the chrome-yellow figures were like something out of a dream as they flew through the drifting red powder.

"So they're all robots . . ." Chuck whispered.

"I really feel very badly," Duffy responded apologetically. "I was certain Mort had told you."

"No . . . No, he didn't . . ." Chuck said softly.

• • •

The clatter and clank of the troop of Roman soldiers marching along the service tunnel was drowning out the faint hum and dry whisk of the three little electric cars in which Tracy, Chuck, and Duffy rode. Duffy was well ahead, but Tracy and Chuck drove along together, running parallel to each other and arguing. They raised their voices as they approached the marching soldiers.

Tracy glanced ahead, then spoke loudly to Chuck, who was skirting the phalanx. "I'll tell *you* something, mister! That's the last time you'll use me to fly-speck Delos!" Her car wobbled and she looked ahead and corrected quickly, avoiding a gladiator with only a handspan to spare. "And if *you* don't stop acting like a paranoid idiot, I hope Duffy throws you out of here."

She increased the speed of her car and passed the stolidly marching soldiers, but Chuck quickly caught up.

"Why didn't he *tell* us they were robots? Why did he wait?" he argued.

Tracy cut ahead of Chuck, avoiding an elephant, painted and draped and wearing a houdah on his gray back, with a sideplate open to reveal a dripping interior tank. "Because he forgot!" she yelled back at him as she swerved back into Duffy's track. "A perfectly human thing to do. And if you weren't so eager—"

"Look out, Tracy!"

She swerved again, missing a tiny band of slim, green-clad fairies marching along behind a brunette in a long dress. "And if you weren't so eager to do a hatchet job, you wouldn't think twice about it."

She turned into another service tunnel after Duffy, who glanced back briefly to see that they were following. A dragon stood to one side and Duffy toured around it, unworrying. Tracy blinked at the green-scaled monster, which was trailing faint whiffs of smoke from its nostrils, its forked red tongue flicking in and out. Chuck ignored the ceiling-high reptile and caught up to Tracy, weaving next to her car as he continued their argument.

"And if you weren't so damned eager not to spoil your video special,

maybe you'd start acting like a reporter."

Tracy's head jerked around and she growled at Chuck in an angry voice. "I will never jump at shadows or waste *my* time looking for dirt that doesn't exist." She squealed her tires as she cut around a silent knight on a caparisoned horse, three lions on his shield and a jeweled sword in his scabbard.

They passed a tram of three cars filled with robot knights sitting stolidly facing each other without expression. The tram was driven by a frog as tall as a man.

• • •

A wind drove a tumbleweeb down the dusty street. It struck a hitching post, bounced off, rolled along next to the weathered boardwalk and came up against the wheel of a buggy. A boot-shaped sign, worn and chipped, creaked in the wind. The gilt was peeling off a long board over a porch that spelled out EMPORIUM.

The board-and-batten doors of a stable swung open to reveal the stainless-steel doors of an elevator opening. Tracy and Chuck blinked at the bright sunlight as they stepped from the padded walls of the elevator. Duffy touched a stud and the steel doors hissed shut, then the worn wooden doors of the building swung closed silently.

Tracy and Chuck looked around as they stepped out of the cul-de-sac into the street. Grass and weeds were growing up through cracks in the boardwalk and around the base of the dusty buildings. There was broken glass here and there and a hotel sign hung from one hook, swinging awkwardly in the slight breeze. The town was hot, dusty, empty, and very authentic-looking—but seemed more abandoned than it did ruined.

Duffy pointed at the buildings around them and indicated that they should walk down the street. "I thought you should see what is left of Westworld." He smiled with one side of his mouth. "I don't want to be accused of trying to hide anything."

Tracy glanced at Chuck, who was peering into a bar through a broken window. "Mr. Duffy, I hope you understand. *I* don't believe anyone is trying to hide anything." Her emphasis on the pronoun caused Chuck to look at her, his face impassive, before he walked on down the street. *"I* think Delos is wonderful," she said. "And I'm sure that will be how my story finally comes out."

"That's very gratifying," Duffy remarked, smiling.

Chuck turned and gestured toward the side streets. "I'd like to look around by myself. Do you have any objections?"

Duffy indicated it was all open to him. "None at all."

Chuck strode off down an alley and Duffy watched him go. “Interesting fellow,” he said to Tracy. “But he certainly has a suspicious mind.”

Tracy sighed, her eyes on the tall figure as Chuck disappeared. “He thinks that quality admirable.”

Duffy faced her. “But still you like him?”

She shrugged and kicked at the dirt, then looked up at the roofs around her. “I suppose . . .” Then she brought herself back to the nuts-and-bolts realism that was her best cover. “Now, I’m worried about your service tunnels,” she said, shading her eyes to look at Duffy. “I’m afraid there may not be enough light for really *good* pictures. Do you think . . .”

Her words continued, but Duffy’s glance was toward the side street where Chuck had disappeared.

Chuck was scuffling along the narrow rutted thoroughfare, his feet kicking dust from the dry ruts as his eyes moved over the façades around him. They were astonishly real, better than the motion-picture sets he had seen. Here, attention to detail had paid off. These were not just store fronts with another set of fronts backing them to give the illusion of more streets within a smaller area. The buildings were full-sized, with historically accurate details, *circa* 1875. Turned and carved posts; porches; brick and stone; railings and hitching posts—all presented a most accurate representation of a Western town. Gilded letters on glass windows announced doctors, dentists, lawyers—and bars. Signs on the front and sides of brick and board buildings told of saddlers, groceries, rooming houses, tanners and buyers of tallow and hides, a music hall, a gunsmith, a variety store, and a barber who also buried people. Mrs. Johnson made apple butter and George Clayton made boots. Tobacco, spices, coffee, copper kettles, and Mason canning jars were available at Howell’s. Rieves’ sold Stetsons, water basins, kerosene lamps, plug tobacco, and flatirons.

Peering through one window, Chuck saw a black pot-bellied stove, surrounded by some weathered chairs within a rail. On a counter was a red coffee grinder from Elgin National Company. The shelves were mostly empty, but a few cans and jars remained. Blanke’s Mojav Coffee, with its picture of a woman sitting sidesaddle on a horse, stood near some cartons of Genuine Bull Durham Smoking Tobacco.

Chuck passed under a Stockmen’s Association sign, and past a barber shop that announced, SHAVING, SHAMPOOING, AND HAIRCUTTING DONE IN THE LATEST FASHION. A poster on the side of a GENERAL MERCHANDISE store advertised Ladd’s Celebrated Sheep Dip and another that H.B. Bell was the proprietor of a corral where teams and horses were for sale, freight was delivered to cow camps and all points west, horses

were boarded by the day or month and were bought and sold on commission, and there was good pasture in connection with said stable and corral.

A drug store sold Cuticura Anti-Pain Plaster, Dr. Kilmer's Female Remedy, Hostetter's Stomach Bitters, Ayer Cathartic Pills, cod-liver oil in brown fish-shaped bottles, Polo Soap, and Dr. John Bull's Vegetable Worm Destroyer for the Human System. Calico was sold for four and five cents a yard, beer was a nickel a giant mug, a couple of coins got you a meal of beefsteak, potatoes, coffee, and a quarter of a homemade pie. There was land available in Kansas Territory. A concert and festival would be held on the third of the month, with "singing by a Quartette, admission fifty cents, 'strawberries are expected.' " The poster also stated: "Patronage of Strangers and Citizens Requested"—for the purpose was to procure an organ for the Congregational Church.

Chuck halted in the street outside the Grand Hotel. It was burned and gutted, with not much more than the ruined façade standing, and blackened timbers beyond. The buildings on both sides were blackened, too, by fire. Strangely enough, the batwing doors to the saloon at the side of the hotel were untouched, although the paint was blistered along the wall next to it. Chuck stepped up on the boardwalk, which creaked under his shoes, and pushed through the saloon doors.

He stood just inside the darkened structure, surveying the ashes and half-burnt furniture. The double doors swung closed behind him, squeaking, and the bare floorboards groaned alarmingly under his feet. The tall reporter looked curiously about, wandering here and there, picking up a broken captain's chair and setting it aside. He saw the long bar, with the brass rail still gleaming; but the mirror and bottles behind were mostly broken and in dusty shards.

Chuck walked to the entranceway leading into the hotel lobby, remembering that in the Old West it was a common practice for a bar to be attached, but no "respectable" women *ever* went in there. He pushed open the high batwing doors and saw the dark and ruined lobby.

He was starting to turn and leave when he stopped in surprise.

His eyes widened as he saw a bloody arm and hand protruding from a dark doorway. Stepping quickly into the lobby, he hesitated, looking around in some apprehension. Then he walked warily over to the door and bent down, feeling the wrist for the pulse. The wrist lifted much too easily, and Chuck found himself holding a severed arm and hand, spiraled with blood and dirty with ashes.

And he grinned.

From the end of the arm, where it would have attached to the shoulder, hung colored wires and a silvery metal hinge. He threw the bloody limb into the debris and started to leave, but the limb, on sliding along, had exposed the shiny edge of something.

Intrigued, Chuck stepped closer and bent down. He saw a flat metal surface that had lifted from the wooden flooring. As Chuck shoved away more of the debris that the arm had shifted, he realized that the heat of the fire had warped up some kind of trapdoor. Scrabbling with his fingers, he found a purchase, and pried the door up enough to get a better grip. With a grunt he heaved it aloft along with scattered ashes and debris; the severed robot arm rolled grotesquely off the rising square of floor.

Chuck dropped the trapdoor and jumped back as a cloud of ashes billowed out. But he had gotten a glimpse of something metallic beyond, and when the dust cloud subsided he lifted the trapdoor again, more cautiously.

Peering down into the square of blackness he had unearthed, he could see very little. He caught only a faint line that was probably a rung set into the wall below. He looked around, picked up a burnt portion of the hotel register, and dropped it into the hole. He heard a faint *thunk* a few seconds later, and no splash. Curious, and believing the hole was not too deep, he let himself over the edge of the opening and searched with his feet for the rung. Finding it, he lowered himself until he found more rungs—which were quite solidly attached—and went carefully down the ladder.

After about four or five meters, he saw that he was descending through a dim-lit tunnel, long, narrow, and apparently not much used. Low-wattage bulbs were set in a line along it, but only one in five was lit. At the bottom, Chuck glanced around him: he had his choice of several passageways. In one direction, he saw, ahead, a faint square of gray against the blackness, but then he looked around again at his choices. Finally, he picked at random and started making his way along a narrow passageway.

Chuck noticed that while the service tunnels of the “new” Delos were wide, high, and well-lit, wide enough for two carts to pass comfortably, he could almost touch both walls in *this* utility tunnel. As his eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness, he saw that there were pipes, ducts, and conduits cluttering the ceiling.

Coming to a bisecting tunnel, Chuck looked both ways and chose the right for no other reason than that it lay, he thought, in the general direction of the “new” Delos. Chuck hesitated only a moment, then shrugged and walked on slowly, peering around him. I can’t go far, he told himself, but I’ll just explore some, and then get back

aboveground.

He did not see the shadowy figure standing in a dark cul-de-sac, watching the intruder pass by.

• • •

Tracy looked down a narrow alleyway between two rickety buildings. “Chuck?” she asked somewhat plaintively and a bit petulantly as well.

No one answered and she moved on. She saw the burned-out shell of the Grand Hotel and moved toward it curiously. Like Chuck, she was drawn to the “something different” aspect of Westworld’s streets.

She stepped up and entered the hotel lobby through the blackened doors. “Chuck?” she called. She stepped across the seared carpet of the hotel lobby and looked through the batwing doors into the ravaged saloon. “Chuck, where are you?”

A bloody hand reached out for her.

It touched her cheek and she jerked away, whirling to look at it.

She screamed!

“Gotcha!” said Chuck, laughing.

He held the severed robot limb out at her and Tracy batted it away angrily.

White-faced, she snapped at the tall, grinning reporter through clenched teeth, “That was funny. Really, very funny. I hope you have a good laugh.” She put her hands on her hips and glared at him. “You know, I was worried about you. I really was. But I should have known better.” Her mouth pulled into a bitter line. “You have no feelings, Chuck—not real ones.” She gestured out at the deserted Westworld. “You might as well be a robot yourself.”

Chuck’s face fell and he looked foolish. “I’m sorry, Tracy. Truly.”

Without a word or another look, Tracy turned on her heel and strode toward the doors. She slammed one open with the heel of her hand and it collapsed onto one hinge, swinging grotesquely. Chuck heard her footsteps down the boardwalk, angry, hard-heeled steps that faded away quickly.

Chuck looked at the robot arm, then dropped it into the ashes. “Damn . . .”

• • •

Duffy led Tracy and Chuck down a long hall and into the Delos living-quarters area. There was a balcony on one side and doors to rooms on the other. Duffy opened a door and smiled warmly.

“This is your suite,” he said. “Your bedroom is up there, Miss

Ballard." Duffy pointed to the second level.

Both rooms shared a common living area on the first level. The suite —with soft maroon sofas and brown and brick walls—was pleasant, colorful, but rather impersonal.

The Delos representative continued in an apologetic voice: "We're somewhat short of space in this area, so I've had to put you together in one suite." He glanced from one to the other as he asked, "I hope you don't mind?"

"Not at all," Chuck said, trying to put the man at ease.

Tracy gave the reporter a dark look. "Speak for yourself," she snapped, still obviously annoyed at him.

Duffy indicated the large television screen, a well-stocked bar, a stack of music tapes, and some current magazines. "I think you'll find it private enough, and comfortable. There are two quite-separate bedrooms and I've taken the liberty of assigning Miss Ballard the upper room. You'll find your things there," he said, smiling at her.

"That was very thoughtful," she answered, trying to keep her annoyance from showing and only succeeding in being stiff.

Duffy then bowed slightly and smiled at them both.

"I'll leave you to yourselves," he said, backing away. "Dinner should be along shortly." Turning toward the door, he continued to talk to them over his shoulder. "Best get plenty of rest; we have a big day ahead of us." He faced about at the door and bid them good night.

"Good night," Chuck called, waving.

Duffy closed the door.

Tracy strode stiffly past Chuck, head up, her face frozen, and started up the stairs.

"Hey, Socks, warm up, will you?" he pleaded. "It was only a joke."

She kept on walking, mounting the stairs in hard-heeled thumps. *"My* bed is up here and *yours* is down there!" she retorted in iceberg tones. "Let's make damn sure we keep it that way."

Chuck blew out his cheeks and watched her go into her bedroom. The door slammed and he heard a lock turn.

• • •

Ron Thurlow rested his head in the lap of a beautiful brunette, while the blond head of the delightful Erica lay on his chest, her ripe body lying next to him on the comfortable couch. A group of returning "spacewalkers" disturbed his lethargic rest and Ron opened an eye to look around the Space Safari lounge sleepily.

Like Las Vegas, the lounge was in operation night and day; but

except for the spacewalkers, who were passing through, no one was here now except for the bartender and Ron's triad. He sighed as the brunette resumed her delicate massage of his temples. Erica, aware of his movements, slowly lifted herself up and kissed him long and thoroughly. Ron released his arm from around her and sighed heavily.

"I just can't do it, that's all." He looked from one beauty to another. "I don't want to hurt your feelings—either one of you—but I can't decide."

"Then don't," Erica purred huskily. "Take us both!"

Ron shook his head. "It wouldn't work out."

"Of course it will," Erica urged. "We're both sex models."

The brunette's smile was lecherously wide and as inviting as Erica's.

"That's okay for you," Ron complained, "but what the hell, I'm no superman."

Erica's long lashes dropped over her cheeks as she bent close to him. "You'll be surprised," she said softly and began kissing him again.

• • •

Mort Schneider came briskly down the hall, turned toward the red security area. Taking a ring of plastic strips from his pocket, he thrust one into a lock. It hummed and a light went on and there was a click. A door opened and Schneider went in.

The crimson light bathed him in blood as he moved past various technicians to the main monitor station, which sat before the biggest of the television screens. Schneider's chief technician faced around toward him.

"We've finished the gross body series and we're starting molecular studies now," he reported to Schneider.

"All right," the gaunt scientist nodded. "Did you alter their food?"

"Yes, sir. We should have four to six hours."

"I want all thermal, X-ray, and electrochemical studies finished tonight," he ordered.

"That's not much time," the chief technician said.

"It will have to do," Schneider replied. His face was drawn as he said darkly, "Our Mr. Browning is much too curious."

• • •

Al looked at Ed's Octavia and his eyes grew speculative. "Hey, Ed, ol' buddy, what about a switch?"

"Uh. Why?"

“I dunno. The grass is always greener, I guess.”

“The ass, you mean.”

“Well, what about it, huh?”

Ed eyed the softly smiling Claudia, sitting next to Al. “Well . . . hell. Why not?”

Al gave Claudia a shove and she moved over quickly to Ed, smiling and reaching out invitingly. Octavia rose and passed Claudia. Al’s hands were all over her as she murmured, “Whatever you desire, master . . .”

“Hot damn!” Al said over her shoulder. “Whoever designed Delos ought to get a medal!”

“Will you tell your friends about the pleasures of Delos?” Octavia asked seductively.

Ed laughed and yelled at Al over the sounds of the orgy. “Did you get that, Al? A little commercial slipped in along with the flesh and fun!”

Al mumbled something, then withdrew his face from Octavia’s flesh to repeat himself. “I’ll tell *everyone!* Except maybe my wife.”

• • •

In the dining area of Tracy and Chuck’s suite a a robot attendant was cleaning up the dinner remains, putting the plates and glasses onto a rolling table. He worked in near-darkness and was quite silent.

Completing his task, the robot rolled the table to the door. He steered his cart around a procession of robots who now entered the suite’s living room, moving briskly. The newcomers wore “clean room”-type garments, except that these were of a shiny, almost metallic shade of red, an intense scarlet that hurt the eyes. The robots pushed in two chrome gurney tables covered with half-sheets of jet black.

The effect of the group was that of some satanic cult who ran a hospital. Four of them left their rolling table and went silently up the stairs toward Tracy’s room, while the four others rolled their table across the darkened living area to Chuck’s bedroom. One opened the door while another pushed the table on through and up to Chuck’s bed.

Without hesitation two red-clad robots picked up Chuck, who was by now unconscious, placed him on the table, and covered him with the black sheet. They rolled him out into the living room and out through the door just as the four other crimson-dressed figures carried a drugged Tracy down the steps and put her limp body on the second gurney. The second group now pushed Tracy out into the hall and

followed Chuck's gurney down the hall.

• • •

A procession of about thirty red-garbed robots were rolling black-sheeted gurneys down a Delos service tunnel. Eight limp, lolling bodies were strapped down on the rolling tables. Among them were Chuck, Tracy, Takaguchi, and General Karnovsky. The blue-green glare of the overhead lights glinted off the robots shiny scarlet clothes and made a strong sheen across the jet-colored sheets.

The robots walked quickly and in silence, except for the rasp of fabric and the faint whisper of the wheels of the carts.

They eventually pushed through a red door, which hissed closed behind them.

• • •

Mort Schneider looked down from an observation porthole into the operating room. The red-clad robot doctors—hooded, and with oval-shaped eye-and-nose openings—the stark white floor, the shiny steel instruments, and the jet-black sheets made for sharp contrast, but it was one Schneider was well used to seeing.

Chuck was brought in first, and transferred to the operating table under the bright lights. The sure, precise hands around him began to attach leads for their test equipment to Chuck's head and body.

• • •

Tracy was lifted from the gurney and put on a gleaming metal table. Red-clad robots swung stereo X-ray equipment over her supine body and a series of monitors lit up. Schneider appeared in a porthole, looking in from a control room, red-lit and stern.

*"Test Unit One . . . On!"* a crimson-clothed robot announced.

• • •

The betatron scanner swiveled into position over the unconscious Takaguchi. His face was marked by a grid of different-colored lines.

A technician spoke. *"Alpha-Niner ready. Beta-One at peak. Topographical units on standby."*

• • •

The technician fastened the last lead to General Karnovsky's chunky body and stepped back.

From the control-room speaker came the commands: *"Alpha-Two-Six-One, prepare to activate. E.E.G., stand by. Tissue sampler ready. Gamma-Eleven-Nineteen at speed."*

• • •

Schneider entered Master Control and strode directly to the four color monitors that fed in the pictures from the four satellite operating rooms where Chuck, Tracy, Takaguchi, and Karnovsky were being prepped.

"Are we ready?" he asked the room at large.

"Yes, sir," reported the chief technician.

Schneider frowned at each monitor. "All right. Begin all graphic studies on my mark . . . Three . . . two . . . one . . . Mark!"

Schneider's eyes were on Chuck. He was naked, with leads arching away from his stripped body like spaghetti. A rising hum continued. Then, without a sound, the reporter's image became a solarized abstract of colors.

A technician came into the frame and put a hypodermic to Chuck's arm.

*"Beta-Three activated . . ."*

*"Mitosis level rising . . ."*

*"Grennell toxin at Delta-plus . . ."*

*"Surface temperature reading is—"*

*"Sigma-Eight to Zero Minus Two . . ."*

*"Ischidrosis at norm . . ."*

*"Activate cymograph on my mark . . ."*

*"Holotony injection . . ."*

Schneider's eyes glittered as he watched the intricate process proceed with a swiftness and sureness denied the human counterparts of the personnel in the operating room.

Tracy's body switched to the vivid solarization on the next screen.

*"Blood study, phase two—activate! . . ."*

*"Thermal constant determined on Beta-Niner . . ."*

*"Epsilon-One-Forty, stand by . . ."*

*"Radionuclide insert . . . Prepare to activate . . ."*

*"Beta-Four activated . . ."*

*"Thermanoid transducer, Five-Six, stand by . . ."*

*"Thanatograph Omega-One—activate! . . ."*

*"Red control, we have a voltage drop in Tetralemma Option Calculator Four. Please advise . . ."*

*“Vector Seven, increase Helmholtz function Point Two . . .”*

*“Theta-One, prepare to activate on my mark . . .”*

*“Program Xi-One, terminate . . .”*

*“Lamba-Five-Niner-Zero, withdraw ethnological tube . . .”*

Schneider watched the changing images on the four screens with an almost passionate intensity. Everything he saw, he knew, was being taped, analyzed, and the conclusions reached activated further programs and guided the robotic hands.

*“Rhema Program Six activated . . .”*

*“Red control, we have retrostalsis on Beta-Niner. Please advise . . .”*

*“Revalorize on Beta-Niner . . .”*

*“Omicron-One-One-Two at DAG Level Two-Four . . .”*

*“Beta-Niner at Sub-Level Two . . .”*

*“Iota Four Virgule Six, your epispastic range is rising . . .”*

*“Epizeuxis, Rho-Ten-Ten . . .”*

*“Alpha-Two-Six, your ultracrepidarian panels are misaligned by four microns . . .”*

*“Monitor Four, nuncupate, please . . .”*

*“Hermitery of two centimeters, lower quadrant, Beta-Niner . . .”*

*“Teramorphous analogy within expected range . . .”*

*“Hepatic malfunction, Beta-Niner. Please advise . . .”*

*“Subject Beta-Seven requires agmatologist . . .”*

*“Upsilon-Five-Four, transfer aesthesiogenic readings to Sigma-Niner-Zero-Four . . .”*

There were red reflections in Schneider’s eyes as he stared at the screens, and a smile of triumph on his lips.

• • •

Tracy sat bolt upright and screamed.

“Chuck!” she gasped, stared around wildly. “Oh, my God—Chuck!”

In the living room, Chuck’s hand dropped away from the doorknob to the hall. The lights were on but he carried a Zeon flashlight and was fully dressed. He jerked his head around at her shriek and started pounding up the stairs.

Her door was locked and Chuck stepped back, raising a foot to break it open; but she swung it wide before he had the chance to break it down.

Wild-eyed and disheveled, Tracy threw herself into Chuck’s arms, clinging to him so tightly he could not use his arms. Behind her back, he transferred the flashlight to another hand and worked an arm free.

Then, tipping up her tear-streaked, terror-stricken face, he asked her what had happened.

"I had this d-dream," she sputtered, her eyes still large and round. She was breathing heavily. "It was terrible. *Awful!"* She looked around, trembling. "It—it seemed so *real.* I was in a hospital and these people kept hurting me . . . They . . . I couldn't do anything . . . I—"

Chuck stroked her hair. "It's all right . . . It was just a dream . . . It's all right . . . Just a dream, Socks. There's no problem now . . . Take it easy . . . It's all over."

He grasped her arm and led her back into her bedroom and pushed her into a sitting position on the bed; then he sat down next to her.

Her breathing slowed and she calmed herself slowly. She brushed back some stray strands of hair and smiled wanly at him. "I'm okay now . . ." She shrugged her shoulders apologetically. "I'm sorry . . . I feel like an idiot . . ." She gazed around the room, and at the disheveled bed. "But it just seemed so *real."*

"No problem," Chuck said with a smile.

Tracy seemed to be aware of his condition for the first time. "What are you doing dressed?"

He smiled faintly and gestured with the flashlight. "Well, to tell the truth, I'm going to take a little unauthorized tour."

She frowned at him. "You can't *do* that! It could be dangerous."

The reporter touched her arm and leaned toward her confidentially. "Socks, I don't know whether there's a real story here or not, but I know damn well I'm not going to find out by following Duffy around."

Tracy straightened up. "If you're going, I'm going," she asserted and started to rise.

Chuck grabbed her. "No. You're *not!"*

Pulling her arm free, she looked at him determinedly. "Oh yes, I am. Just because I get mad at you doesn't mean I want to see you get hurt."

Chuck rose, pressed down on her shoulder. "You stay here."

He had started for the door, but Tracy jumped up and followed.

"As soon as you go out that door I'm going to call Duffy!" she warned loudly—which stopped Chuck in his tracks.

He looked at her with a tilted head and hurt expression. "You wouldn't do that . . ."

Her face was set in a fixed frown. "Try me."

Chuck eyeballed the woman standing beside him. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Damnation, but you are the—the most stubborn broad I ever met!" He waved his hand at her. "All right! But

hurry up!”

Chuck ambled out of the bedroom as Tracy stepped quickly toward her closet, stripping off her rumpled pajamas. In the hall of the suite she heard him talking.

“And don’t take all night to figure out what to put on. We’re going to be trampling around in some dark, wet tunnels, and the rats won’t care what you wear!”

Tracy stopped as she heard the word “rats.” She blinked and shouted out to Chuck, “Did you say rats?”

“Gray ones . . . about a meter or so long.”

She quivered but struggled into her clothes. “I know you’re lying,” she called out to him. To herself she said: “I hope . . .”

• • •

The reception area of the Delos resort was empty, except for two robot guards. Most of the lights were out or dimmed, but they glittered off the clear plastic domes covering the Delos model like shimmering moons.

Tracy and Chuck stepped forward, out of a hallway, then froze as they saw the two sentries. After waiting, breathless, a moment they crept out, bending low to put the big Delos model between them and the guards. They froze again when one of the robots stirred and turned his head toward them.

But nothing happened.

When the guard’s head turned back, Tracy looked at Chuck. He shrugged and they tiptoed across to the escalator that led to the higher levels. It was not running; but bent low, they had no trouble scampering quickly up it to a higher level. Out of sight of the guards below now, Chuck thumbed an elevator button.

“Where are we going?” Tracy whispered nervously, peering around.

“The power plant,” Chuck whispered back.

“Why?”

“I think the tunnel I followed starts there.”

The door to the elevator hissed open quietly and they entered. Chuck pressed the bottom button and they began to descend smoothly. Thinking swiftly, he pressed Tracy back against the wall so that no one might see them through the clear plastic port of the elevator door, for there were silent, unmoving guards on every level.

The elevator door finally hissed open and Chuck stuck his head out, holding the door open with his shoulder. They were in a short concrete corridor with another elevator across the space before them.

To their left, at the end of the corridor, was the room housing the huge Delos power station. Chuck crooked his finger at Tracy and crept out without looking back. Hugging the shadows, they reached the entrance to the station and surveyed the big room carefully.

Robot workers were at work everywhere, oiling, repairing, wandering about with clipboards recording readings from dials and performing other, more esoteric duties. The place was a vast, colorful maze of varicolored pipes and huge black furnaces.

Chuck pulled at Tracy's hand and they slipped carefully over to a black iron staircase and wound down it speedily. Ducking behind an array of pipes and conduits, they studied this new room for a few moments. Chuck pointed at a sign ahead and Tracy read it.

WARNING TO ALL MODELS 400 TO 700.
THIS AREA IS ABOVE
HUMIDITY TOLERANCE LEVELS.
CONTROL PERMISSION REQUIRED
BEFORE ENTERING.

Tracy put her mouth to Chuck's ear and breathed, "I thought they shut down for six hours a night."

"Not the powerhouse," he answered softly, his eyes studying the entrances to the lower tunnels.

"What do we do?" she questioned, looking back over her shoulder nervously. The whole thing didn't seem such a great idea now.

Chuck pointed to the robots moving through the machinery on seveal levels, on catwalks and in aisles. "They're only four hundreds. I don't think they're programmed to stop us."

"Are you sure?" Tracy asked in a whisper.

"No . . ."

The lanky reporter started out boldly from behind their temporary shelter and Tracy gave a start, hastening to follow. Aping his model, she simply walked across the open area toward the tunnel entrance Chuck had selected. Robots crossed in front of them and passed close by, but none of them "saw" the two humans.

"It's kind of eerie—" Tracy remarked.

"Shush!" Chuck admonished her.

Several robots were just leaving an aisle; they were carrying a tube replacement tube and the two reporters had to dodge around them—the robots didn't even appear to see them. And no one shouted an alarm.

The two made it to the tunnel entrance and halted to look back. "That's why we have to send men—uh, *people*—to the planets," Chuck

said, correcting his male-chauvinist statement.

"Huh?"

"Machines see only what they are programmed to see," he explained. "They can't register anything they weren't made to register."

Tracy shrugged her shoulders, trembling. "Okay, fine. But now what?"

"Follow me."

Chuck started forward into a utility tunnel. Tracy shivered and quickly caught up with him, grasping his elbow.

The tunnel was narrow, the floor wet in spots and gritty under their feet. Their footsteps echoed hollowly. Sweaty pipes ran along one side, thick and dusty, Chuck clicked on the flashlight as soon as they were well back from the tunnel mouth.

They walked.

And walked . . .

"Do you know where you're going?" Tracy eventually asked, then yipped as a rat ran across the narrow passageway, disappearing into an access hole.

"Not entirely," Chuck said absently, staring ahead.

"Terrific!" But Tracy tagged doggedly along.

Once they stumbled over a discarded shard of asbestos sheathing from a pipe repair. And they passed several cross-tunnels, but kept straight ahead. Neither of them noticed the dark figure that stepped silently from the gloom of a cross-tunnel to follow them.

• • •

"Hey, I'm tired!" Tracy complained, tugging at Chuck's arm. "How about a break, Daddy Long-Legs?"

"Um," Chuck said, "just a little farther." He was flashing his light in several directions; now he grunted with satisfaction. "Over here!"

Tracy followed the tall reporter to a wide area in the tunnel, where she saw a set of iron rungs embedded in the concrete wall, leading up out of sight. Sinking down on a big round pipe, she blew out her breath as Chuck flashed the light up the vertical wall.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"If I figured right, we're underneath their research and development area."

"Is that good?" Tracy wiped her brow and stared critically at her wet hand.

"If they're keeping any secrets, this is where they ought to be," he

said, putting his foot on the bottom rung. He looked back at Tracy. "Coming?"

She heaved herself to her feet and started up the ladder after him. "Are you kidding? And leave this garden of paradise down here?"

• • •

Tracy was still muttering as they emerged into a large room filled with benches of scientific equipment and standing banks of electronic gear.

"What did you say?" Chuck whispered, crossly as they closed the metal floor plate behind them.

"I said that was a concrete gopher hole," she complained, jerking her thumb over her shoulder. "Now what?"

They stood in a darkened room. Chuck pointed at a dimly lit sign above a door: RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT, AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY, and, in smaller letters, "Alpha Only," He sidled over to the door and listened with an ear pressed against the panel. Carefully he tried the knob and the door opened. As he peeked within, Tracy crowded him to see in as well.

The room was another maze of cables, pipes, huge shrouded pieces of equipment, tables piled with neatly arranged test equipment, and large bulky objects whose function was a mystery. Chuck opened the door wider and noticed on the opposite side of the room a sign that said: BETA LABORATORY, SATELLITE THREE, AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY.

The two reporters slipped into the room and stood listening. There was the hum and whisper of air conditioning, but no other sound. The only light came from several "clean rooms" across one end of the big laboratory. Chuck indicated the light and they moved toward it, wary, their eyes scanning their crowded surroundings. All around them were pieces of equipment under construction and test. Here was a huge ape arm, three times longer than Chuck's height—a huge, hairy object with wiring and strong aluminum and chrome protruding from the shoulder end. On the next table was a tiny figure dressed in forest-green jerkin and tights, poised as if to fly, an impish smile on its tiny face. Across the aisle was the lower half of a muscular male figure wearing only a leopardskin loincloth. Two benches farther on lay the head of a great lizard or dragon, with bulging eyes and too many teeth.

Tracy and Chuck came to the big windows of the "clean room" area. Within, under bright lights, lay an oriental warrior, in full sixteenth-century armor, his simulated Tadatsuna blade in an ornate scabbard and his chest protection folded aside, the wicker chestplate opened to show its interior electronics. Wires ran from the warrior to an

elaborate control panel behind him.

"Duffy mentioned they were building an Eastworld," Tracy remembered. "He said—"

"Duffy said a lot of things," Chuck interrupted.

They moved on to the next "clean room" windows, where a lovely Japanese lady, wearing a full ceremonial obi, stood in front of another control panel. She was poised in a graceful position, holding a fan, but wires now led out from her head to a panel and one arm was opened, its electronic circuits visible. Chuck and Tracy passed on without stopping.

Two figures stood, unmoving, in the next "clean room"—two brutish, hirsute man-like figures with low brows and protruding jaws. They wore untanned skins and the female was nearly as hairy as the male. Their dull eyes stared sightlessly at the wall of glass before them.

Chuck and Tracy walked by again without pausing and found an outré scene in the next "clean room."

A multi-tentacled figure, almost as tall as Chuck, reddish with brown and black markings, hunched over a piece of bizarre machinery. Wires fed from an open access panel in its spindly legs to another control panel.

"The Martian updated replacement for Futureworld," Chuck drawled and Tracy nodded agreement.

The next "clean room" vista had movement and the two reporters edged close to peer in. A small brontosaurus was lifting its head, its mouthful of teeth filled with what appeared to be raw meat. The movement was repeated over and over, and wires ran from the baby dinosaur to another control panel.

" 'Prehistoric World,' I suppose," Tracy remarked matter-of-factly.

Chuck now stopped and glanced around the darkened lab. His flashlight flicked on and he played the light over a nearby control panel. "I gotta find some lights," he whispered.

Tracy squinted into the darkness and suggested a direction. "Over there . . . beyond that bulky— Oh!"

Chuck's moving light had settled on a reclining human figure whose eyes were looking directly at them, and Tracy started before realizing it was a robot on a bench, a Cro-Magnon improvement over the Neanderthals in the "clean room."

Grunting, Chuck moved to a large control panel that took up most of one wall of the lab room. "You'd think a simple light switch would be easy to find, wouldn't you?" he asked as he studied the banks of indicators.

Tracy meanwhile wandered along the wall. “Why don’t we get out of here?” she suddenly asked nervously.

“We just *got* here! And, besides, there’s something I want to find out.”

Abruptly the overhead lights went on and Chuck jerked his head around to see Tracy standing by an ordinary wall switch. She looked embarrassed.

He laughed, then continued to scan the control panel. With the lights on, he could see that it was the largest in the room. He noticed a red-edged switch at one side and, taking a chance, threw the lever.

Part of the big laboratory began to function. Lights came on, pumps throbbed, motors whirred into life, and an odd thumping sound began. Chuck reached out quickly and threw the switch to the OFF position. The sound died and Tracy looked at him skeptically.

“Do you know what you’re doing?” she asked.

Chuck waved his hand at her, studying the controls. “Don’t worry about it. I’ve got an instinct for this kind of thing.” He paused, chewing on the inside of his cheek. “Let’s try this one.”

Reaching out, he pulled a second switch. Nothing happened. Both reporters turned to look about. Nothing. No sound. No movement.

“No soap,” Chuck chuckled.

“An instinct, huh?” Tracy walked over and pointed at another switch. “Try that one.”

Chuck shrugged and reached out to throw it. A low hum started at once.

They waited. Nothing else happened.

Chuck made a face and grumbled, “The hell with it. We’ll try them all. Maybe there’s a combination.” He started flipping switches randomly and carelessly.

Hums.

Whirrs and clicks.

Thumps, modulated hums, and flashing signal lights.

Ticks, bubbling retorts, faint whiffs of ozone, and rippling bands of readout lights.

Tracy and Chuck stared around in delight.

• • •

In another room, whose airlock door was labeled VACUUM CHAMBER—DANGER, something began happening. In the round, white, empty vacuum chamber, out of sight of the two reporters, something began to form in the air.

There were, at first, flicks of dull color in the center, in the empty space.

Soon the colors and flicks and shimmerings became areas—irregular blots of seemingly solid material suspended in the vacuum of the chamber. In seconds, the areas defined themselves into three flat but roughly humanoid shapes, flickering and pulsating shapes that looked as if they were composed of pointillist dots. But unfilled areas filled in rapidly and, while Chuck and Tracy were still throwing switches, the shapes refined themselves into three powerful-looking samurai warriors, brutally strong. Finally the images—unmoving, as if frozen—had built rapidly into three-dimensional figures.

A click sounded as the figures reached full status. A red light on the chamber wall blinked to green. There came a faint hiss as air entered the chamber, equalizing to the outside pressure.

The three samurai stirred, as if coming awake. Their hands automatically gripped the swords slanted through their belts, and they looked around with glittering dark eyes.

• • •

Chuck pointed to another area of the research lab and suggested they look there. He and Tracy passed the former vacuum chamber without looking in, but glued their faces momentarily to the windows of two empty ones farther on. At last, they approached a larger area of the vast laboratory, one with a second-story balcony running around it. The floor of this high-ceilinged area had massive equipment bolted to the floor that the first, lower part of the lab could not have held. Iron staircases led up to the balcony from several points, and overhead was a huge crane on rails that ran the length of the huge room.

Chuck and Tracy saw well-defined areas where control panels stood before work platforms. Some of the platforms were empty, but one contained a slender and exceedingly spiny dragon, green-scaled and twisting, moving its head in a repetitive pattern and flicking its long tail. On another platform stood an angry-faced Captain Henry Morgan, in colorful pirate clothes trimmed with white lace and gold buttons. On the next platform sat a alligator whose mouth opened and closed menacingly.

“Watch out, Disney World!” Chuck muttered.

• • •

The rounded end of the vacuum chamber had a thick airlock.

The wheel now turned from the inside and the metal dogs twisted free. The hatch swung abruptly open and the three Japanese warriors

strode out, each pulling his curving sword free as he landed on the smooth concrete of the outer room. Their eyes glittered through the slits in their helmets as they scanned their new surroundings.

• • •

Chuck pointed at one of the staircases. “Let’s get a look from up there.”

He and Tracy walked past a bulging metal cylinder labeled THETA-SIXTY-ONE: THROMBOGENIC SYNTHESIZER to mount the stairs. They paused partway up and overlooked the huge room: square cabinets, tubular tanks, spherical tanks, concatenated bulbs, writhing conduits, and conical containers were scattered in an orderly chaos over the floor, creating in effect walls around various experimental and work areas. Chuck could see a larger-than-life cyclops seated on a cube, staring dully at a blinking light. Nearby was a nude male figure, impressively muscled, with a red cape and limp pair of blue tights on a chair close by. A fat, jolly Santa Claus was surrounded by a covey of leprechauns on another research platform. Paul Bunyan loomed ominously, three times higher than a man—ax and all—over a bank of murmuring computers.

Tracy gestured at the complex below them. “Why in hell don’t we come back in the morning? This is about as exciting as a visit to the waterworks.”

“It shows what they are planning . . . I think.”

Tracy grunted and climbed up toward the balcony, urged on by Chuck. “Uh-huh. Really dangerous stuff! Santa and the elves. Paul Bunyan—but no Blue Ox! Fairy-tale stuff.”

On reaching the balcony, Tracy turned to look at Chuck coming up behind her, but suddenly her face changed and she brought a knuckle up to her mouth.

“Chuck . . .” she said quietly.

He looked up at her word and furrowed his brow. “What?”

“I . . . think we’re in trouble.”

Chuck glanced back toward where she was staring and saw three samurai warriors, swords glinting in their hands, bounding over some pipes and coming right at them.

“Jesus!” Chuck said fervently.

He looked around frantically for a weapon, saw nothing, and ran up the last few steps to the balcony. Spying a length of aluminum pipe, he grabbed it up. At the same time he grabbed the frozen Tracy by the arm and yanked her savagely back. Turning her around, he shoved her toward another ladder, one leading upward to another balcony.

“Climb!” he commanded.

Tracy started up the ladder, then slipped and fell two rungs to the balcony floor, but she grasped the rungs again and dashed upward.

Chuck looked back over his shoulder just in time to see the first samurai swinging his sword. Chuck ducked, his aluminum tube coming up automatically and deflecting the blade upward and striking a control panel on the balcony, which smashed a readout monitor and exploded glass into the room. Chuck immediately swung the pipe with all his strength and the Nipponese warrior staggered back under the impact; groping backward for the railing, he missed it, fell into the opening of the stairs, grabbed again for the railing. But his momentum carried him over the railing of the downward-slanting steps and he fell from the balcony.

There was no scream. Only a rattling crash.

In an instant the other two warriors rushed up the stairway at Chuck, who was scrambling up the second ladder after Tracy.

She stood at the top, looking around desperately: there was only one way to go—out along the catwalk to the cabin of the overhead crane, which was retracted to that end of the big room. Running along the narrow catwalk, she fumbled at the cabin door. It opened and she climbed in, glancing back at Chuck as he scrambled out onto the catwalk, his pipe-weapon scraping along on the gridwork.

Chuck turned to smash down at the samurai coming up the ladder, but the warrior ducked back and the reporter’s blow resounded off the gridwork square. He turned and ran toward the crane.

“Get it running!” he yelled.

Tracy looked at the control panel and reached out with a trembling finger. The cabin vibrated slightly as the motor whirred to life. Chuck jumped in the door and slammed it behind him.

The cabin, unfortunately, had no lock and plenty of glass.

They started moving only when Tracy shoved forward a lever, but by that time both of the samurai had gained the catwalk. One of the Orientals jumped for the moving crane as the other turned and started moving along the upper balcony.

“This glass box is no protection!” Chuck shouted and opened the door.

“Watch out!” Tracy screamed as the crane started out over the machinery far below.

Chuck stepped onto a very tiny and narrow catwalk that ran along the horizontal neck of the crane. The samurai warrior was crouched on the crane, his eyes glaring. He was ready for Chuck. The reporter took a good grip on the slim aluminum pipe and advanced gingerly

toward the oriental attacker.

The samurai's sword flashed out and Chuck barely avoided losing a leg. He stuck out the pipe, holding on to it with both hands, as the Japanese did his sword. Then a movement caught his eye: the second warrior was pacing them on the balcony that ran along the wall.

The Japanese struck again, his sword clanging metallically off Chuck's protective pipe. Chuck moved back, then jumped sideways as the warrior's sword slashed down.

I have to keep him away from Tracy, Chuck thought, and swung his pipe in a strong baseball-bat swing. The pipe only touched the parrying samurai sword, but on the backswing the reporter managed to strike the warrior's arm. No harm was done, but the samurai seemed more wary.

The second samurai paced along meanwhile, sword glinting, waiting.

The Japanese attacked again and Chuck was hard put to keep the blade away from his body. He could not attack, only defend, and he knew that on flat ground the warrior would have gutted him in moments.

Another movement now caught his eye. The third warrior, the one who had fallen, was climbing the crane's trailing cable, hand over hand. Looking around, Chuck gave his attacker a sudden flurry of blows, driving him inexpertly back. Then he turned and jumped to the door of the crane's cabin.

Tracy had, slowly, so as not to cause Chuck to fall, swung the crane to the opposite wall and then had worked it just as slowly back to the other side, as the samurai on the balcony approached the far side of the room.

"Come on!" he bellowed at Tracy, pushing her out onto the balcony opposite the samurai. The warrior he had been duelling bounded along after them and Chuck turned to fight once more. The alien's sword swished through the air, striking Chuck's pipe held now in both hands; the blade skittered along the pipe and Chuck barely escaped losing his fingers. He grabbed the pipe and swung hard while the warrior was temporarily off balance.

The pipe smashed into the samurai's helmet and the warrior lurched, toppling over the railing and grabbing at the metal siding of the balcony. But his grip was hasty and he lost his hold, falling to the floor below. Chuck did not watch, but turned and ran after Tracy, who was running along the balcony away from the second samurai.

Tracy and Chuck scurried down the staircase to the first balcony and had nearly reached the floor of the huge room at the moment when the third samurai joined his fellow-warrior above. Chuck looked

up to see them quickly descending, and urged Tracy on to the lab floor. She cried out as she struck her side against the steel railings but kept grimly on.

Then, suddenly a figure swung into their view and dropped to the floor before them. It was one of the Japanese, swinging down on an electrical cable, one of many that hung from the ceiling. Tracy and Chuck skid to a halt. They were cut off. The clatter behind them told them that the other warrior was coming down fast.

Chuck pointed at a nearby room, which appeared to have a heavy airlock door. It stood open.

"There!" he yelled, and shoved Tracy toward it.

She jumped through and the reporter followed, but the warrior on the ground was extremely fast. His sword hissed through the air and almost decapitated Chuck, who managed to dodge only at the last minute. He hit out with his pipe at the Japanese fighter, giving him a solid blow in the chest and staggering him back. The warrior's arm became entangled in the very cable he had used to swing down from above.

This gave Chuck just enough time to jump into the room, a "clean white" chamber. The door swung closed with heavy slowness and was just clanging tight as the two warriors arrived outside together.

Chuck spun the inner wheel, but the silent fighters outside grasped the wheel outside and stopped the turn. Chuck dropped his pipe and grabbed at the flailing wheel desperately urging it toward locking position, but he was not strong enough to stop the opening turn of the airlock wheel.

He looked around desperately, and saw another, similar door deeper inside the chamber.

"Tracy! There! Back there! That other door! *Fast!"* he commanded.

When she had scrambled through, Chuck let go and dived for the inner hatch, snatching up his aluminum pipe as he went. He got this second door closed securely before the warriors entered the "clean room." He thrust the aluminum pipe, now much knicked and battered, through the spoked wheel to lock the hatch in place.

Chuck and Tracy cowered against the inner wall of the chamber, which was dimly lit from two tiny holes on either side. Both were breathing hard and gazed around for some way to escape.

"Oh, my God—look!" Tracy exclaimed in horror.

Chuck stared incredulously as the inner hatch wheel turned slowly, bending the heavy aluminum pipe as though it were putty.

"They're—" Tracy's eyes blinked rapidly. "It's like *nothing* to them!"

The pipe bent like spaghetti and the wheel slowly turned. The door

swung back, making a terrible scraping shriek as the pipe rasped momentarily over the floor. The samurai entered, their swords weaving in the semi-darkness like the tongues of deadly snakes.

Chuck moved to cover Tracy, but his eyes were watchful. He knew they were going to die, but he was hopeful that something—*something*—would happen.

The two samurai separated as much as the chamber would permit, their curved swords thrust out, held two-handed. They were obviously ready for their killing blows . . .

The sound was low when the four first heard it, building up through the perceptions, seeming to grow out of the beat of blood and the hum of machinery. And then the lights in the chamber snapped on full and bright.

The two warriors froze in position.

"W-w-what happened?" Tracy gulped.

Chuck looked at the suddenly immobile warriors and edged toward the door. Neither of them appeared to notice him. "I—I don't know," Chuck gasped, the blond video reporter after him.

"Someone's coming!" Tracy said with a husking gasp.

Chuck stopped and watched the still-open inner door. Moving slightly, he could see between the two warriors and out both hatches to the research room beyond. He stood quietly, listening to the approaching footsteps, which were amplified by the double-chambered "clean room."

All at once a man was peering into the first open airlock door. He was bearded and squinty, wore coveralls with a greasy rag in the hind pocket.

He looked across toward them suspiciously. "What the hell are you standing in there for, anyhow?" He gestured impatiently. "Come on outta there!"

Tracy took a step, then stopped. "Is . . . is it safe?"

The bearded worker looked disgusted. "You ain't died and gone to heaven, have you? 'Course it's safe." He cocked a thumb at the two warriors. "You can kick *'em* in the butt if you want. They won't do nothing." Again he gestured for them to come out. "Now, come on!"

Chuck and Tracy slipped between the two warriors and out of the two chambers. Without a word, the workman turned and walked away. He indicated they should follow but did not look back.

Tracy looked at Chuck and they both shrugged.

The workman moved along with a kind of bent-over-sideways shuffle, his head turning this way and that cautiously. A belt kit of tools bobbed on his right hip as he stumped toward a small door in

the lab. Trotting, Tracy and Chuck caught up to the man as he opened the door with a plastic key.

“Listen, we don’t know how to thank you,” Tracy began. “We—”

The eyes of the workman danced over the two reporters, then he grumbled at them. “Just hurry up’ll do fine. Come *on!”* He held the door open and ushered them through. “There’ll be a whole damn *army* of iron here in a minute!”

The door closed behind them and the workman switched on a flashlight as the door closed out the light from the laboratory. Tracy and Chuck realized that they were at the same concrete “gopher hole” they had entered from.

“Go on, go on!” the man urged almost angrily.

Tracy went down first, followed by Chuck. The workman looked back, hearing a sound; then he hurried down into the darkness after them.

• • •

A big lab door swung open and Mort Schneider burst in, leading a platoon of Delos guards. They began to search the area at once. Schneider moved to the body of the samurai warrior, which lay crumpled on the floor. Then he looked up. The crane had completed its circuit and had turned itself off, resting against the far end of the big room.

The scientist's gaunt face was suppressing fury. He stared at the searching guards.

One of the robots came up to him to report. "No trace of anyone here now, sir. But we have the monitor tape ready."

Schneider nodded. "All right. Let's look at it."

• • •

The floor of the tunnel was wet and gritty as Tracy, Chuck, and the bearded workman hurried along. The man was muttering to himself, but in the echoes of their passage Chuck was unable to understand what he was saying.

They came to a crossroads in the tunnel system. The workman scuttled past both reporters, rounded a corner, and stopped, breathing heavily. Chuck and Tracy caught up with him, also puffing for air, and the bearded man heaved a sigh of relief.

"It's okay. We're safe now!" he said, giving them a quick, squinty look.

"Won't they search down here?" Tracy asked anxiously.

He shook his head. "Naw! Ain't no piece of iron ever comes down here. It's too wet for them." He giggled, shaking his shoulders. "Screws up their circuits. Had a fire in the castle once. Sprinklers went on—and you should have seen them robots." He cackled happily. "Staggered around like a bunch of drunks at a Legion convention. Funnier 'n' hell . . ."

Tracy and Chuck exchanged looks. In a short time they had got back at the spot where they had first entered the tunnel system.

The workman pointed. "The powerhouse is up there. You can go back the way you came."

He turned and started to leave, but Chuck stopped him.

"Um—I'd sure like to talk to you."

"Got nothing to talk about now," the man shrugged, looking away from both the reporters. "Maybe later," he added.

Tracy stepped up to him, smiling warmly in her best break-the-ice

manner. “You see, we’re reporters and we’d—”

“I know who you are,” the workman interrupted, shifting his feet and not glancing at them.

“Look, uh . . .” Chuck turned to Tracy, then back to the overalled workman, who squinted briefly up at him. “I don’t know your name.”

“Name’s Harry,” the man said grumpily. “Harry Croft.”

“Yeah, well, Harry, we’ve really been looking for someone like you.” Chuck smiled and patted the man’s shoulder. *“You* know, somebody who really knows this place and isn’t afraid to talk about it.”

Harry looked around some more, then gave Chuck a piercing, almost hostile look before his eyes slid off. “I don’t know about that. I did you a favor ’cuz I don’t like to see anybody get in trouble.” He pulled out his greasy rag and wiped his hands. “But I don’t know about the talkin’ part,” he mumbled.

“Harry, do you know who this lady is?”

Harry narrowed his eyes at Tracy Ballard. Then he looked away. “She’s a reporter, ain’t she?”

Chuck was incredulous. “A *reporter?* Harry, she’s an *electronic journalist!”* He waved his hand in Tracy’s direction. “She’s got a verified fifty-five million viewers worldwide, and she wants to interview you for her program.”

Harry took a pause, then looked up at Tracy. “Is that right?”

Tracy quickly backed Chuck’s play. “Uh, sure. Yes! You bet.” She smiled reassuringly.

Harry brightened up and grinned at both of them. “I’ve been here since it opened,” he bragged, waving his rag at the surrounding complex. “I mean, you know the *right* one—way back.” He was warming up fast to the idea of being on television and was quickly giving his credits. “I seen it all,” he said with confidence.

Chuck moved his hand across the air. *“Harry Croft,”* he murmured almost reverently, *“the man behind the iron mask of Delos.* That’s a story!” he concluded triumphantly.

Harry had a sudden suspicious remorse. “I . . . don’t know . . .” Then he brightened again. “Say, would they see me in Cleveland?”

“You bet they will,” Tracy promised.

“My mother lives in Cleveland!” He scuffed at a grease spot on the concrete floor. “I guess she’d get a kick out of it.”

Chuck clapped him on the shoulder. “Hell, man, she’ll be *proud!”*

Harry shot them both a happy, bearded grin, then ducked his head again. “Well, I guess it won’t hurt.” He looked around quickly,

squinting into the shadows. “Just so Schneider don’t find out. He’s meaner ’n’ a rabid dog.”

Harry paused a moment, then made a movement as if he had decided. He started back into the tunnel from which they had just come, beckoning to the two reporters. “Come on!” This way.”

Chuck and Tracy exchanged glances and followed Harry, an excitement building in their hearts.

• • •

Schneider and two guards opened the door to Tracy and Chuck’s suite without knocking, flipped on the lights, and spread quickly out. Two guards bounded up the stairs and into the video star’s room while Schneider walked quickly to Chuck’s bedroom.

He came out of the empty room frowning, and glanced up as the guards emerged from Tracy’s chamber.

“They’re not here, sir,” the man reported.

“No,” Schneider said, nodding to himself. “They must be with Harry!”

The robot guards followed the scientist out of the room. They did not bother to turn out the lights or close the door.

• • •

The two shuffled along the concrete tunnel until Harry told them to stop. Their flashlights were out and the workman advised them to stop fidgeting and be quiet.

After a long moment, which seemed to stretch on and on, Harry grunted and turned on his light again. “Nobody there,” he grunted and waved them on. Rounding a corner, they perceived an end to the damp passageway a short distance ahead.

“Watch it, here!” the workman warned. “Lemme get the light.” He hopped over to the tunnel side and light flooded out toward them.

Tracy and Chuck climbed down into Harry’s living quarters and looked around. It was a little corner tucked away under a mass of pipes, boiler plate, conduit, insulated air-conditioning ducts, and sundry valves, switch boxes, and inspection plates. They ducked under overhead pipes and found that Harry Croft had a small workshop here, too, with a bench littered with tools and some partially assembled—or disassembled—pieces of equipment. They saw a cot with a rumpled blanket, and on the wall next to it a number of pin-ups torn from magazines. A refrigerator was fitted neatly between some vertical pipes. In the center of a small cleared space stood a battered wooden

table and a few mismatched chairs.

“I got ’nother room topside,” Harry told them as they ducked under pipes toward the cleared area. “But Clark and me like our little corner best of all.”

“Clark?” Tracy said, then yelped.

Standing quietly in the shadows was a robot that had no face, only an area of open circuits, molecular circuit block, electronic panels, and vacuous sensors. Although the robot wore a human workman’s coverall, Chuck could see more open circuitry and structural units in his wrists and forearms.

“This here’s Clark,” Harry announced with a kind of shy pride. “C’mon here, Clark!” The robot moved out of the shadows in a somewhat stiff and formal manner. “Shake hands with these folks,” Harry said, and the robot complied.

Tracy looked nervous, but Chuck had gotten over his initial surprise at coming face to face with one of the, *now,* “enemy.”

“Glad to meet you,” he said prosaically.

“He’s an old four-hundred series I saved from the junk heap,” Harry explained. Tracy thought he sounded like a proud parent. “Fixed ’im up good.” He looked at his two guests. “You want something? Coffee? Or maybe some booze . . . ?”

Tracy sank gratefully into a chair. “Coffee would be fine,” she said, looking around.

“What kind of booze are you serving?” Chuck asked.

Harry grinned through his thick, bushy beard. “Anything you like—as long as it’s gin.”

“Terrific!”

“Clark,” Harry said, “give us two gins and a coffee. And don’t fergit the ice.” He glanced briefly at Chuck, then his eyes slipped away. “Got to stay *on* him! He’s gettin’ sloppy.”

Clark shuffled around making coffee and drinks, and the two men found seats. Tracy got up and wandered over to the workbench, where she plucked nervously at her spotted and dirty clothes, then picked up and put down some of Harry’s tools.

“Why do you call him Clark?” she asked, turning.

Harry turned in his seat and grinned at her. “*You* know—from Superman! Clark Kent—Man of Steel!”

Tracy picked up a faceplate from the workbench. “Is this his face?”

“Yeah,” Harry nodded. “I got tired of taking it off every time I had to fix him. He don’t mind.”

Tracy looked at the curving piece of plastic. “It’s too bad. He was

handsome."

"Oh, yeah," Harry agreed. He jerked his thumb upward. "He used to work Roman World." Harry's eyes got sly and he grinned at Chuck. "He was the big iron man in a lot of orgies. Seen a lot, ol' Clark has.

Harry grinned fondly at his robot servant, who had shuffled back to the table carrying the drinks.

Tracy stepped closer. "It's a wonder he can still move at all!"

Chuck turned his attention from Clark's "face" of wiring and sensors and spoke to their bearded workman friend. "How about you, Harry? You must have some tales to tell."

Harry grinned and ducked his head. "Well, you know"—he gave Chuck a quick, smirking look—"you know, you develop a taste for the iron after a while." He got a faraway look in his eye. "I remember one night, me and Frenchy was down here with two broads from Westworld. We cut them out of the master circuit so they didn't go off when they shut that section down. 'Course, you know, they're programmed to please a guy any way he wants it, so . . . Well, Lord, we blew a few circuits *that* night, I tell you!"

Chuck spoke very carefully. "Did you say Frenchy?"

"Yeah, he used to work here. Why?" He gaped at Chuck with a grin that slithered off into suspicion. "You know Frenchy?"

Chuck had started to answer when a crash of sound exploded and light flooded into the room.

Schneider and two burly Delos guards swept in, ducking their heads cautiously to avoid the low roof and overhanging pipes. They glared suspiciously about while the surprised humans stared. Schneider's eyes came back to Tracy and Chuck.

"May I ask what you are doing here at this time of night?" he asked in a tight voice.

Chuck waved an airy hand at Schneider and his gin sloshed. "Hi, there!"

Tracy put down Clark's faceplate and stepped to the back of a chair, which she gripped with white hands. "We couldn't sleep, so we wandered around and just . . . found ourselves here."

Schneider was hostile as he sneered, "That's not very likely."

Chuck put down his drink and glared back at the scientist. "Are you saying the lady is a liar?"

Tracy spoke up quickly. "Um, Harry here was just telling us about the good ol' days."

Schneider did not return her smile. "He would have done better to remember that we don't encourage contact between our employees and our guests." His sharp gaze went to Harry, who was staring into

the middle distance as if nothing had anything to do with him.

"We're not your guests," Chuck said heatedly, "we're reporters. And *you* asked *us* here, remember? So why don't you save that line of horse pucky for your robots?" Chuck picked up his gin and took a big swallow, fuming.

Tracy still gripped the chair back tightly, but her voice was tough. *"Doctor* Schneider, if we are not free to interview anyone we please, then we might as well leave Delos *now."*

Mort Schneider noted Tracy's flashing eyes and Chuck's glare, and he made a stab at being friendly—an effort that obviously hurt. *"Of course* you can talk with anyone you wish." He made a gesture with his palm up. "I merely request that you inform Mr. Duffy, and not sneak about at three in the morning." A thin smile was forced onto his lips. "Surely that's not too much to ask?" He looked expectantly from Tracy to Chuck.

Harry now cleared his throat and put his hands on his knees, preparatory to rising. "Listen . . . *I* was just leavin', anyway," he said, a whine in his voice. His eyes slid about, touching bases lightly.

Tracy put out a hand. "It's all right, Harry. It *is* late, and I think *we're* the ones who ought to go."

Schneider gestured toward the door and the two guards stepped outside. "If you'll follow me, I'll see you to your rooms."

Chuck only settled deeper into his chair, his long legs stretching out. He took a sip of his drink, made a face, looked into the glass, and asked, in a casual undertone to Harry: "Make this yourself?"

Harry didn't answer; he looked squirmingly uncomfortable. His eyes touched on Tracy, who was gazing impatiently at Chuck. Chuck didn't seem ready to go anywhere.

"Chuck . . . ?" Tracy said tentatively.

The reporter looked into his glass, shrugged, took a sip, and put down the drink as he answered. "Right." He heaved himself to his feet. "Thanks, Harry! We'll see you."

Harry looked very itchy-footed. "Yeah. Okay . . . Sure . . ."

"So long, Clark," Chuck said airily and walked out.

Schneider paused in the doorway to give Harry a long, frosty stare. Harry squirmed and hastily downed his own drink, not looking back at the senior scientist. Eventually Schneider left, closing the door behind him.

Harry sighed. "Clark," he mumbled, "give me another gin." He blew out his cheeks and dropped his forearms on the table. "I'll tell you, it never changes," he muttered, watching Clark pour him a drink. "Get mixed up with people, and all you got is trouble!" The robot brought

Harry his gin and the workman pointed at a chair. "Sit down, pal, and let me tell you why I can talk to *you . . ."*

• • •

In the hallway of Tracy and Chuck's suite, Schneider bowed very slightly and very stiffly. "Good night," he said.

Chuck looked past him at the guards outside. "And thanks for everything, Doc," he said airily. "It's been a swell evening!"

The scientist stepped into the hall and Chuck slammed the door almost on his heels. Turning, Chuck followed Tracy into the living area, where she slumped into a chair.

With a long sigh, she stretched herself. "Mister, if this was your idea of a swell evening, you've got the wrong girl!"

"Oh no, I don't," Chuck said, strolling toward her. "You're gonna be a helluva reporter one of these days."

Tracy's eyebrows went up. "Hmpf! What did I *do?"*

Chuck grabbed her hand and pulled her to her feet, turning to tug her toward the bedroom. "Come with me!"

A smile twitched at her lips. "I thought you'd never ask."

Moments later, her expression changed. Chuck preceded her into the bedroom, but instead of doing any of the things she had imagined he might, he pulled his battered suitcase out of the closet and threw it on the bed.

Before he opened the case, a number of odd ideas raced through Tracy's mind about what he might be taking from it. But when he flipped the suitcase open she saw only badly packed clothing and a squashed shoe box. He plucked it from the contents and shoved the suitcase away.

"A guy by the name of Frenchy got himself killed trying to tell me about Delos," Chuck told her, taking off the lid of the box and dumping a bunch of newspaper clippings on the bed. "I never got the *story,* but he died trying to give me these."

Tracy's curiosity overcame the momentary damage to her ego. "What are they?" she queried, coming closer.

Chuck took a fistful and held them toward her. "A bunch of clippings about some heavyweight people from every country on earth. Politicians," he said, shaking the newsprint streamers, "bankers, commissars, generals, executives—you name it."

Tracy frowned and took the clippings. "I don't see the connection."

"I checked them out." His finger tapped the clippings in her hand. "Every one of them was a guest here at Delos in the last month or so."

Tracy raised her eyes from the text. “And so . . . ?”

“So, I smell a rat, a *big* rat! But I need to talk to Harry alone . . . And Socks, I think I’m gonna need your help.”

She rattled the clippings as she gestured. “I don’t know . . . If we keep on breaking all their rules . . . they’ll never let me come back with a camera crew. They’ll give the story to NBC or CBS or ABC or someone.” She sighed. “Anyway, we promised to be fair and—”

“Help me tomorrow,” Chuck urged her. “If I don’t get something solid from Harry, I’ll lay off. Okay?”

Tracy bit at her lip, but agreed. “Okay.”

Chuck hesitated, then stepped closer to the attractive blonde, who looked up at him with a cautiously happy expression. “Hey,” he said, “I thought you were pretty terrific tonight!”

“You weren’t too shabby yourself.”

With no problem at all they moved into each other’s arms. They kissed for a long moment, then Tracy’s hand opened and the clippings tumbled in a ragged heap to the floor. Chuck pulled away with a smile.

“Just a minute,” he said.

The opened suitcase thumped to the floor and he swept the remaining clippings off the bed. Tracy’s eyes sparkled.

• • •

The sun slanted down, bringing out in sharp detail every irregularity of the rough stone of the city wall. The heavy timber portcullis of the big gate was up and merchants, peasants, and tradesmen moved in and out. Just beyond the high stone walls sat some crude tents and a few stalls selling fruit and vegetables. Guards patrolled the walls, their spear tips glinting brightly.

A head came up sharply, listening. Other heads turned.

The sound of pounding hooves approached and the people in the gateway hurried to be free of its confines. An old man, carrying a great bundle of faggots on his bent back, stepped off the road and pulled his cap off. The guards looked more alert and a trumpet was sounded.

From, over a grassy rise came a galloping troop of armed men. Takaguchi and his two friends were in the lead, fully armored, riding hard. They were followed by a grim company of robot retainers, in chain mail and colorful tunics. Riding through the wide gate, they cantered along the city streets to the square, their hoofbeats echoing off the stone buildings.

In Master Control, a technician panned his remote cameras as the horsemen reined their mounts to a halt on the square's cobblestones. Peasants now scurried into view and took the knights' reins, tugging at their forelocks submissively. Takaguchi and his men swung down from their saddles and swaggered toward the Red Lion Inn, pulling off their gloves and chatting loudly. The technician switched to the inn's interior camera to see Takaguchi enter.

Throwing his gloves down on a rough oaken table, the Nipponese bellowed, "Drinks for my men!"

On the next console a controller was watching a scene from Spa World. Young Karnovsky, in a splendid uniform, was leading his beautiful bride through a grassy sculpture garden. They strolled along a curving graveled path to a graceful white gazebo, marvelously intricate and complex. He took her hand and a robot string ensemble, dressed in late Edwardian clothing, began to play a Lehar waltz.

The Russian general started to dance with his smiling companion, ignoring the other young couples strolling along the paths and over the grassy swards. Nearby a fountain burbled—erratically.

The controller switched to another camera, one that was fixed upon the fountain. He panned it down and saw Harry Croft, underground, at the base of the fountain. He was wringing wet, angry, and struggling with a pipe wrench upon a valve hidden beneath the water of the lower pool.

*"Please expedite the repair on the fountain,"* the technician said smoothly.

Harry did not answer the voice from the radio that was clipped to his equipment belt. His wrench slipped and he splashed even more water upon himself. His lips were moving angrily, but nothing more than grunts came onto the technician's receiver.

*"Four-Two-Seven, do you copy? We can see the fountain, and it is not functioning in its proper mode. Do you copy? Proper mode for Fountain SW-Nine-Niner-Six-Bee-Three is specified in Spa World Maintenance Manual Four-Slash-Eight-One, Revised Alpha Gamma One. Do you copy? Four-Two-Seven, please respond."*

Harry threw down his wrench with a splash and grabbed at the radio. "I copy, you miserable bag of bolts!" His voice rose to a frustrated yell. "If you think you can do it better 'n me, get your iron butt out here! Otherwise, shut up! Four-Two-Seven out!"

The technician switched back to the gazebo cameras, where young Karnovsky in his glittering uniform and his lady in her long ball gown, waltzed on, oblivious to the still intermittent spouting of the fountain and the faint yelping curses of Harry Croft.

• • •

Al yawned and looked over at his friend Ed. “Hey, where are you?” he asked.

“Huh?” Ed raised his head from the middle of the four nude slavegirls who were in attendance upon him. “Whatya want?”

Al scratched his chest and brushed aside Julia, Octavia, Messalina, and one whose name he kept forgetting. “Oh, I dunno. What you want to do today, Ed?”

Ed grinned past the bare flesh. “More of the same.”

“Oh.”

“What do you mean, ‘Oh’?”

“Just ‘Oh.’ ”

“Hey, you bored or something?” Ed inquired.

Al shrugged. “Well, hell, there is only so much a guy can do within a limited period of time. I ain’t no satyr, y’know.”

“No what?”

“Satyr.” He grinned weakly. “It’s a word Julia taught me last night after we requisitioned the extra dolls. She says it’s a mythological animal that was sexually . . . uh, insatiable.” His grin broadened.

“Did she use it to describe you?” Ed asked, the humor in his voice just below the surface.

“Yeah, ain’t it grand?” Al jumped off the couch, scattering the naked and half-naked females. “Listen, suppose we wander over to Futureworld or maybe Spa World, huh?”

Ed encircled two of the voluptuous females and grinned. “Hey, man—why? Maybe they don’t have anything like this over there.” He peered inquisitively at his friend. “What’s eating you? I thought you were gung ho for Roman World. You’re the horny dude that talked me into it.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know, I know, but . . .” He let his voice trail off and picked up a goblet, but it was empty. One of the girls started to fill it, but he tossed the cup away. It clattered and rang on the marble floor and Ed looked surprised.

“Hey . . . !”

“Oh, hell, I dunno, Ed. I’ve done stuff I’ve dreamed about all my life.” A momentary smile crossed his face. “Boy, *have* I!” Then the smile faded. “But . . . well, after the orgy, after the bath, after the big feast, after the games . . . Well, what is there left to do?”

Ed laughed. “The ‘term’nal boredom of twentieth-century man’!” He swung around to sit up on the silk-covered couch. “You figure an orgee, a feast, and a big Roman arena ain’t enough for your twelve

hunnerd a day?"

Al groaned. "I dunno . . . I dunno . . . There must be something else. I—"

"Sure," Ed said, "more of the same! Hey, do you get tired of one steak? One ripe red apple? One leg of roast chicken? One good book? Never want another?" He chuckled. "That's what it is all about, Al, just like you were telling me—it's fulfill-your-fantasy time!"

"Yeah, yeah," Al muttered. He let the four beautiful females pull him back to the couch. "Yeah . . . yeah . . . I guess that's it. At least, I hope it is . . ."

• • •

Mrs. Reed was feeling guilty. Deliciously guilty. The handsome robot "companion" was the answer to her every secret desire.

"I wonder how I can go back?" she asked herself aloud.

The versatile, tireless robot raised his head and remarked, "I beg your pardon?"

Mrs. Reed blushed. "I was just talking out loud," she murmured. "Just go back to what you were doing."

"Gladly, ma'am."

It *was* going to be difficult going back to her husband, she thought. She sighed. But maybe he'll have learned a lot, too . . .

Mrs. Reed fervently hoped so, no matter what it took.

• • •

Mr. Reed was in a tower with a beautiful maiden, but *he* was not feeling guilty at all.

If he thought about his wife, it was with the hope she was having "fun" as well. The few times he considered the sexual aspects of the Delos experience, he likened it all to a training exercise. He had to force himself to think of Maiden Fair as a robot; it was easier and much more natural to think of her as a human—a lovely, responsive woman who had found the man she was looking for. Thinking of her as a collection of circuitry was no fun at all—and, when he looked at her, almost impossible.

But Reed did hope his wife was finding the sort of vacation they had both wanted. They had talked about it often, and had planned to visit Delos much earlier, but then the big Westworld scandal had broken and they had been afraid to come. Nevertheless, when the publicity started on the "new" Delos, they had just itched to go.

"They say all the problems are worked out," Mrs. Reed had said.

“And look at these picutres! Doesn’t it look just *gorgeous?”*

Her husband had agreed; but then he had always wanted to go. He hadn’t needed much convincing that all the problems had been solved. “All new projects have glinches,” he said to his wife. “But they seem to have things running smoothly now. If it’s all right with you, I’ll write in for a reservation.”

“Yes, dear,” his wife said. “The price is high, but I think we’ll get our money’s worth, don’t you?” Her eyes had been on the muscular, smiling young man depicted in the brochure.

Reed had written in quickly enough, even signing up for an extra day when he saw more of the resort’s publicity. “What the heck,” he said to a friend, “Delos is something *special,* not just a trip to the circus or Disney World, or the Bahamas. It’s . . . well, it’s *Delos.”*

The beautiful face and figure of Maiden Fair intrigued him. But, more importantly, it was the *attitude* and the ambience of Medieval World that struck a deep chord in him. It reminded him of reading *Ivanhoe* and about Camelot, of pretending (when he was a child) to be King Arthur or Sir Lancelot and using wooden swords and garbage-can lids for shields. It was something he had thought he had put aside, something forgotten.

“Maybe you don’t forget your earliest dreams,” he said to himself. “Maybe you *can’t.”*

“Milord?”

Reed laughed with embarrassment. “Just talking to myself,” he said. “It’s a bad habit I have.”

“Would milord care for more wine?”

“Yes, thank you.”

Wine; smooth, prime flesh; the feel of chain mail; and the sound of trumpets. A broadsword in his hand. Pennants fluttering in a fair, English, spring breeze. Adoring ladies; prancing steeds; sturdy men-at-arms. Pointed pikes; rough, stone castle walls; good English bowmen; grass so green you could hardly believe it.

And a noble task.

Rescue the Princess.

Avenge the honor of the Queen.

Protect the King.

Go forth to do battle, behind the regal banner, before the foot soldiers, heart pounding, the feel of a great stallion between your legs.

Battle.

Fighting a noble cause. Defending the Faith. Protecting England against the invaders. Stalwart knight to good King Arthur . . . to

Athelstan . . . to Richard the Lion-Hearted . . . to Henry II . . . to the Black Prince . . .

Reed sighed. “Fetch my armor, woman,” he commanded.

“Yes, milord.”

“And my sword!”

“Excalibur, milord? Or Curtana, the sword of Edward the Confessor? Or beautiful Ar’ondight, of Launcelot of the Lake?”

“Ar’ondight, Maiden Fair, for I go forth to do great deeds!”

• • •

The slumbering camp was beneath stately oaks, at the foot of a wooded incline, and not far from a bubbling stream. The fires had all but burned out. Only faint traces of smoke arose, and a morning breeze lightly touched the dark leaves of the old oaks. The tents were colorful and the high-backed saddles of the horses had been set outside each tent. The steeds themselves were hobbled near the stream, where thick, lush grass grew.

The calm of early morning was abruptly broken by the clatter of hooves, then by wild yells, as a group of horsemen rode down the wooded slope right into the center of the camp. Takaguchi’s fierce yell brought sleepy, half-dressed warriors from their tents. They were cut down in the Japanese warrior’s first charge through the camp, cut off as they were from their tethered horses.

Takaguchi and his friends rode briskly among the tents, then wheeled their powerful warhorses and charged again. One of the commander’s friends loosed the arrow from his crossbow, which sank itself into the chest of a charging knight. Takaguchi crossed swords with another, narrowly missed losing his leg, then cut his blade into the side of the knight’s neck with a sickening crunch.

The Japanese businessman and his fellow-kmghts wheeled their prancing horses for a third charge. A wide, dark-browed man came at Takaguchi swinging a huge, double-bladed ax, but the Oriental jumped lithely from his horse and engaged-the ax wielder with his flying blade. The ax-man was powerful, but slower; and after a few narrow escapes, Takaguchi sank his steel into the warrior’s throat. The ax fell to the ground, where it stuck, and the owner of the mighty blade next to it, gushing blood.

The Japanese proudly put his foot upon the corpse and grinned happily at one of his friends, who hung his crossbow over his saddlehom and pulled out a Nikon to begin snapping more pictures.

“I thought we arranged to smash that camera last night,” a technician said into his mike to a subcontroller.

“Yes, sir, we did,” was the reply.

“Well?”

“He had two of them, sir.”

• • •

Ron Thurlow sat gloomily in the Space Safari lounge, stirring a Bloody Mary and staring out one of the nearby ports. Spacewalkers were drifting by as the Moon loomed up on schedule. Ron barely looked up as Eric, smiling handsomely, sat down next to him.

“Good morning, sir. Are you going to spacewalk with us today?”

Ron took a sip of his morning drink. “Yeah, I guess so.”

“Good!” Eric responded, as if the answer had been important to him.

“Uh, say, Eric . . . uh . . . can I ask something?”

The dashing robot had been about to rise, but he stopped and said, “Yes, sir,” very politely.

“Have you ever been in love?”

“No, sir. I am not programmed for sex.”

Ron shook his head. “No, I don’t mean sex . . . I mean *love.”*

“I know the *word,* sir, but—” Eric began.

“What I really mean is . . . uh, like the girls here, like the ones I was with last night? I mean, do they have any feelings?” Ron looked even more unhappy. He took another sip, then stared out at the spacewalkers.

Eric smiled happily. “They are programmed to simulate all human feeling.”

Ron nodded gloomily. “Yeah, yeah. But they don’t *really* feel anything—for one person, I mean. You know, like people?”

Eric frowned very slightly. “You mean a disturbance in their circuits because of a single-person readout?”

“Uh, yeah, I guess that’s what I mean. Kinda.”

Eric looked firm. “No, sir, that would be incorrect programming. They must relate to every guest equally,” he lectured. “You all pay the same.”

Ron waved his hand vaguely, staring at his drink. “Yeah. Well, it wasn’t anything. I just wondered.”

“Quite all right, sir.” The handsome robot stood up. “See you at the docking hatch.”

“Sure,” Ron answered, poking his forefinger at the ice cubes in his drink. “Sure . . .”

• • •

In the huge octagonal chamber that housed the rocket, Harry Croft was tightening the bolts that held a piece of safety rail to the side of the iron platform. He was squinting, cursing almost silently to himself, and struggling to get at one difficult bolt. Far below him, a number of colorfully garbed guests followed one another along a wide catwalk into the interior of the huge projectile.

Harry's wrench slipped and he hit his knuckles. Jamming them into his mouth, he mumbled curses around the bruised bones. When his radio beeper went on, he snatched it savagely from its belt clip and snarled into it.

"Yeah? This is Four-Two-Seven! What do you want?"

*"We have an emergency in the Roman bath. Please proceed immediately to Station Five."*

"I haven't fixed this railing yet," he complained, glaring at the offensive metal.

*"I'm sorry, Four-Two-Seven. Four-Five-Nine and Four-Three-Six are unavailable. You'll have to come back to it later."*

Harry signed out and stuck his radio back; then he picked up his tools, his mouth grumbling silently all the time. He shook the railing before he left, and it was, indeed, still very wobbly.

"Damnfool iron," Harry muttered as he clumped away.

• • •

Duffy gestured at the large round hall. "We call it our Inner Space chamber and we hope to make it a regular part of Futureworld." He grinned at Tracy and Chuck. "The idea is to actually make a videotape of a dream." He smiled at the expressions on the reporters' faces. "You can take it away with you, play it back, and find out what you were dreaming about."

"That's incredible!" Tracy said. There was doubt in her voice, but acceptance, too.

"Do you want to try it?" The Delos representative asked pleasantly.

Tracy glanced at Chuck, then turned back to Duffy. "Sure, why not? Maybe . . . hey, maybe I could use the tape on the program!"

Duffy nodded happily. "I think you'll find it a unique experience." He pointed at a large console complex just outside an entrance to the big round room, which they had been skirting. Several technicians were at the monitors. Duffy turned to the tall newsman. "Chuck, if you'll wait here . . ."

"Sure. Go get 'em, Socks," he told Tracy. "This I gotta see!"

Tracy stopped. “Wait a minute!” She stared at Duffy in surprise. “You mean he can *watch?”*

“Unless you object . . .”

She frowned. “I don’t know whether I do or not.” She shot Chuck a look, then glared at the monitoring screens. “It depends on what I dream!”

*“I’ll* never tell,” Chuck drawled, crossing his chest with an index finger. “Cross my heart!”

She laughed. “All right, wise guy. Maybe it’s about time you learned something about women!”

“This way,” Duffy explained.

Tracy followed him to the airlock entrance to the round hall. She glanced back at Chuck as she went through and he waved at her. Making a wry face, she went into the console room.

The walls of the room were black. A large contour chair stood in the center, perched on a circular pedestal lit rather dramatically from underneath. Huge lights with reflective mirrors were positioned to point at the chair; and around the entire chair-pedestal complex was an intricate “fence” composed of metal units that linked together in a geometrically exact grid. Duffy led Tracy to a “gate” in the fence and gestured for her to enter.

The reporter hesitated. “You’re sure I won’t have a nightmare?” She looked around at all the gleaming equipment. “This looks pretty frightening!”

Duffy smiled reassuringly. “We’ll see to it that that doesn’t happen.” He led her through the gate to the pedestal. “This contour chair is designed to remove any pressure along the spinal column. And the material ‘bleeds’ air at the exact temperature of your body.” He took her hand and she stepped up and sat down. “You will see nothing, feel nothing, and hear nothing. Your mind will begin to feed on itself.”

Tracy sighed comfortably, but the questing reporter in her was still there. “Something like sensory deprivation experiments, where you can start hearing the sounds of your own body?”

Duffy smiled. “Something like that—only this is *mental.* Now, just relax and I’ll get out of the way.”

He stepped down, closed the “gate” in the geometric fence, and quickly left the room. As he came out, he saw Chuck peering through one of the observation ports.

“You’ll see more by looking at the monitors, Mr. Browning,” he said. “She’ll just be sitting there, apparently doing nothing the whole time.”

Chuck tore himself away from the window and stood behind the

technicians. On a screen labeled BRAIN WAVE MONITOR he saw a series of bursts: a complex pulse and flow of brain waves. A technician touched a control and suddenly a different color of waves was flowing across the screen.

Duffy pointed at various other screens, which were showing different waves, superimposed images, matching brain-wave flows, and many things Chuck did not understand. “Every thought,” Duffy explained, “like every eye blink, heartbeat, footstep, or yawn, releases currents of electricity which can, be transformed into waves.”

“She’s got a lot on her mind!” Chuck chuckled tipping his head toward the busy screens.

“All human brains do, Mr. Browning.” Duffy gestured at the consoles. “We are recording two thousand and ten different waves from five thousand eighty-six separate brain locations. Millions of bits of information.”

Duffy moved along a bit, to another area where stood two large machines with hooded viewscreens; these were manned by two technicians. “We take it all in . . . and then we put it back together on these.”

“What are they?” Chuck asked.

“Take a look,” Duffy offered.

The reporter peered over the shoulders of one of the technicians, looking in under the dark, hooded screen. What he saw was chaotic—a rushing stream of dots, lines, blobs, vague shadowy shapes. They flowed out of the center of the screen in an onrushing cone of pale colors. The technician dialed a vernier scale and the colors deepened. Then the indefinite shapes began to take form . . . Some were blurred, and some repetitive; but they, became more definite with each repetition. Some were sharp, and some floating and sustained, moving but not getting anywhere. Some were flurries that lasted only a second or two—little meteor showers of impressions and of bright images, flashing, darting. Some were streaks of pure color, writhing past, sometimes vivid pictures of things Chuck recognized.

He saw his own face, then Duffy’s, then an old photograph, its edges wavy—something out of Tracy’s past. A lake . . . birds . . . a Christmas package being opened . . . a house on a street . . . the steps of that house . . . a tricycle . . . a bicycle . . . a window . . . a doll . . . a man and woman whom Chuck did not recognize and who were smiling. A table was set for dinner . . . then he saw a street . . . a car . . . a Ferris wheel . . . cotton candy . . . a kitten . . . a cat . . . several kittens . . . a book . . .

“Do you know what you’re seeing?” Duffy asked.

“I can’t believe it!” Chuck exclaimed, amazed and completely

captivated. On the screen now were flowers, buildings, faces, dresses, books, knights, dragons, faces. Faces . . .

"Well, it's true. You are looking directly into her mind. We have learned how to convert thought waves back into the images the mind creates. It's not perfect, of course . . ."

"It'll do," Chuck whispered, staring fascinated at the screen.

Faces: men, women, children . . . Then dogs, cats, an elephant, a tiger . . . trees, grass, houses all mixed in with heros and maidens, villains and castles. The faces became older, young adults and then more mature. A man's face formed slowly, faded out, came on again . . .

"The most difficult part of the invention was decoding the personal and quite intimate 'code' that each person uses when he or she files information. Quite difficult, really, considering the difference in behavior, language, early programming, and subsequent conditioning."

Chuck was not paying much attention to Duffy as he talked on.

"But we solved it at last. That is, we *are* solving it. We get better with each experiment. We are refining our program so that we can more quickly get right to the visual imagery."

On the screen were more and more faces, and more hints of flesh, of bodies, of hands and shoulders.

And faces.

"At first it took us *hours* before we could move to the video-recording mode," Duffy went on. "Now we've shortened the response time practically to seconds. As you can see, she is becoming quite visual."

A distinct face had formed—then slipped away—then came back changed. Chuck pulled his gaze away and looked at the other screens. On one of them he saw Tracy sitting quietly, apparently asleep. He looked back at the hooded viewscreen.

A man's face had indistinct features. He was speaking, but when the technician flipped a switch and sound came in there was music instead of words.

"Who's that?" Chuck inquired.

"Reference?" Duffy, bent under the hood, too, asked the technician.

"Beta Gamma Prime. Model Twenty Slash Ninety-Two, sir."

"What's that in English?" Chuck asked.

"A fantasy lover," the technician answered without emotion.

Chuck looked up, his face somewhat flushed. "I'm not sure I'm ready for this . . ."

The technician flipped two switches and turned a dial one setting. *"She's beginning to dream. Start video recording on my mark . . ."*

• • •

In the Red Room, a technician suddenly became more than ordinarily alert. On his monitor screen, brain-wave patterns danced before his eyes.

*"Patterns of Ballard recording. Mental: Alpha and Beta strong reception. To Inner Space chamber, need clearer angle on Six-Point-Oh area."*

*"Roger. Turning up angle on Six-Point-Oh,"* came a reply.

• • •

Chuck bent to look under the hood again. He noticed that the monitor was labeled MIND FLOW, ALPHA.

The technician continued, *". . . Three . . . two . . . one . . . Mark!"*

Behind him a number of video recorders whirled into use, their wide tapes winding swiftly. Chuck watched, intrigued, as the images began to form a more coherent scene upon the screen.

The mists cleared. The streaks of color faded and the technician seemed to dial them out. The random images were depressed and eliminated, until there was only a single scene, somewhat edged in mist. The color was soft, pastel, and somewhat unreal.

What Chuck saw now was a long country road, a dirt road through empty plains, with a few gnarled oaks along the roadway.

"Why the strange color?" he asked.

"It's her favorite," the technician replied.

"I'll be damned!"

Tracy was driving down the road at great speed, wind blowing her hair, handling the car skillfully through the turns. The car, Chuck noted, was beautiful and very, very, expensive. He smiled at her taste and agreed with it. It's a high-budget dream, he thought—and why not?

The technician said, *"Pain-pleasure gradient, please."*

Chuck's eyes moved to the side, where two glowing lines at ninety degrees to each other popped into view on a small screen. A colored dot moved up and down on the vertical line. At the moment it was reading slightly above the mid-line. Chuck decided Tracy was enjoying the drive; but considering the range of the graph, it was a fairly low-level pleasure. He looked back at the main screen.

Tracy drove with carefree abandon, her eyes slitted almost shut against the windstream, her hair whipping about her ears. Chuck

wondered for a moment why they were not seeing Tracy's dream directly from *her* point of view. Are we all conditioned by movies and television to see *outside* ourselves? he wondered. But a sudden movement from Tracy brought his attention back quickly.

She had turned to look to the side of the road, and after a blurred transition he saw what she was seeing/dreaming.

A black-clad gunslinger with vivid, rather unhuman eyes was riding a beautiful horse in dreamy slow motion by the side of the roadway, pacing the swift sports car easily. He stared at Tracy with a fixed, insolent audacity as he galloped easily along.

She turned her head and urged more speed from her car.

She looked again at the dream rider and her face registered a confused set of desires.

The rider had moved in close, and was easily competing with her fast car. He stared at her, a half-smile on his face. The light glinted off tiny spots of metal on his gunbelt and clothing.

Tracy stared back at him . . . then ahead at the road streaking by. For a moment Chuck saw the road as she saw it and it was obvious that the car was at top speed. But when she turned her head back, the dream rider was pacing her easily. She looked again at the road . . . The trees rushed by . . . Then she looked back at the rider—

He was gone. Only the trees blurred past.

She frowned, then her head turned again, staring ahead almost dreamily—

Her eyes widened.

She threw up her hands and let go of the steering wheel!

As in a dream, the car moved toward the black-clad rider, who was just ahead, sideways to the path of the onrushing car. The car was almost upon him! The horse reared!

Tracy was running down the road as hard as she could—on foot now—her hair streaming behind her. The gunslinger was catching up with her, walking now, but in his deadly and determined stalking stride. He came closer and closer, although she was running and he was walking.

Tracy was going as hard as she could, and only occasionally glancing back; but the gunman was closing in. As she looked back, the screen filled with his face and his eyes glistened.

The technician spoke. *"I'm getting some degradation."* Chuck tore his eyes away to look at the pain-pleasure readout. The glowing dot had dropped below the mid-line. *"Switch to Alpha Line Five,"* the technician said crisply. *"Beta Omicron Six, switch to Reinforcement Level Two."*

*"We are on Alpha Line Five, and tracking,"* came the reply.

*"Transition to Reinforcement Level Two complete."*

The technician hit two more switches.

Chuck was locked into the screen, ignoring everything else, utterly captivated by the dream fantasy that was unfolding before him. Vaguely, and with some unease, he wondered if *he* was going to be shown—and in what manner—and how he would feel if he were *not* to show up in her dream fantasy . . .

Seven horseman road over brown, featureless hills toward the screen. They were dressed in scarlet "clean suits," which stirred something vaguely in the back of Chuck's mind, but his attention went to the leader, who was carrying a bound-up Tracy across his saddle. They rode over the harsh, bleak landscape toward a scarlet-painted Victorian house that also seemed familiar to Chuck, but he recognized it as a house he had seen earlier in her dream, in one of the fragments that had streaked passed.

Then the image on the screen blurred with speed as it streaked toward a distant horse and rider on a bare brown hilltop. The screen zoomed into a closeup, of the earlier, black-clothed gunfighter's face. Following this came a blurred transition to an upshot of the scarlet Victorian house. For a moment, during the transition, the windows of the house became the guttering eyes of the gunfighter.

Chuck saw Tracy on the ground before the house, surrounded by the seven men in scarlet hoods. Her hands were bound. The men began to close in around her. They held large silver hypodermics in their hands, much as a knife is held.

Chuck's mouth felt dry.

*"Approaching the upset point,"* the technician murmured. *"Switch to manual, Cee Em, please."*

The black-clad gunslinger rode up to the scarlet house, dismounted in a smooth, practiced, effortless move and started toward the grouping of red-cloaked figures surrounding Tracy.

The men in scarlet turned away from the recumbent figure of Tracy, reacting to the oncoming gunfighter. They ran at him, their silvery hypodermic needles raised high as weapons. But the gunslinger drew as he moved, his gun firing, the sound of the explosions booming and distant, echoing and fading.

The men in red jerked and twisted under the impact of the bullets, falling away from him. She turned and began to run, but the gunman's weapon continued to fire, inexorably taking its toll. He moved through the growing white mist, stalking Tracy with the same sort of inevitable movement that he had on his horse—effortless, smooth . . .

The mist swirled and Chuck now saw Tracy on the floor of a white

bedroom. Mist heavily obscured the outer edges of the image, but the gunslinger strode in and pulled the wide-eyed video reporter to her feet. A hand on her waist, his other hand unraveled the knot of the scarlet cord that bound her wrists. Throwing the cord from him contemptuously, he pulled Tracy to him and kissed her hard. But she broke away, backing toward the white bed.

He wheeled toward her, his dark figure blurring into merely an abstraction of motion, a dark stream across the Mind Flowing screen.

Tracy, too, was only a blur across the screen, indistinct . . . uncertain . . . turning . . . turning . . .

It's like a dance, Chuck thought, a blurred, swirling movement of lovers seeking each other through a misty pastel fog . . .

They came together in slow motion . . . embracing . . . melding . . . The bed was beneath them . . . Their kisses became deeper and increasingly passionate . . .

Chuck looked at the pain-pleasure readout screen. The glowing dot was at the optimum pleasure mode. He was not pleased. Reluctantly, he looked back at the Mind Flow screen.

Tracy's face filled it, flushed with sexual pleasure.

"We're losing it," the technician said to him "She's waking up."

Chuck straightened; his jaw clamped shut. He turned away toward the fantasy chamber and followed Duffy to the airlock door.

Duffy opened it and a sigh of air ruffled his hair. He glanced back at Chuck. "Better give her a moment." He smiled softly. "Real life is a shock after that."

Chuck nodded. "I'll bet," he said quietly.

Duffy pulled the airlock hatch open farther and entered the chamber himself.

Chuck blinked and looked around. No one was watching him. He moved off quickly, hurrying to a set of iron steps which, he guessed, must lead down below the round chamber. He trotted down the steps none too quietly, and entered a wide subterranean space. Overhead, to one side, the rounded bottom of the fantasy chamber bulged downward. Breaking into a run, he scampered around the curving wall until he found a dark tunnel entrance. He paused only a moment before bolting down the gloomy passage.

• • •

"How do you feel?" Duffy asked Tracy solicitously, as he helped her out the airlock door.

She laughed self-consciously. "I feel as if I've been sleeping for

hours." Then she looked around. "Where's Chuck?"

Duffy turned, too, a frown deepening on his bland face. "I don't know. He *was* right here."

The video reporter shrugged, for it had just occurred to her Chuck was off hunting. "He probably went back to the suite," she said lightly. "He said he might." She turned to Duffy with animation. *"Listen,* how do you *ever* do that?" she asked, waving at the fantasy chamber. "You've go to *explain* this to me!"

Duffy looked uncertain, his eyes probing the dark space around the big room. But Tracy took his arm and pulled him toward the control consoles.

"Now explain it again, Mr. Duffy. You reach into my mind, like telepathy? Or is it something like an advanced E.E.G., reading the electrical impulses? My science isn't very good, so if you'd go over it again . . . ?"

Duffy allowed her to pull him toward the control center, but he looked continuously over his shoulder, his face suspicious and sullen.

• • •

Harry pushed some chips into the center of the table. He peered up at his robot Clark and held his cards close to his chest. "I'll call," he said. "What d'ya got?"

The salvaged robot sat expressionless as always, not moving, holding his cards. Harry leaned toward him. "I *said,* I call!" Nothing. "Now damnit, show me your cards . . ." Harry squinted his eyes at the motionless robot; then he grunted in dismay. "Oh, hell!"

Reaching into his tool belt, he pulled out a screwdriver, then leaned over and delicately inserted the tip of it into Clark's face and turned something within. A tiny lightbulb buried within the headful of circuits glowed brightly.

Harry leaned back, slipped the tool into his belt with a practiced movement, and spoke loudly. "Now! What do you have?"

Slowly Clark put down his cards, one by one. Harry watched in growing apoplectic dismay.

"Four kings!" He slapped the table. "Now, damn all, you *can't* have no four kings." He leaned forward and snarled at the robot, "You've been cheating again, that's what!" The blue-clad repairman leaned back in disgust. "Damn all hunks of iron!" He hit the table again and threw down his cards. "I don't know why I bother with you, anyways."

Clark raked in the chips.

Harry snatched at the scattered cards angrily. "It's *my* deal . . ."

Tapping them into a neat stack, he swiftly shuffled them. “Five card stud, Jacks or better to open,” he said nastily. “And if you—” He stopped, his head tipping toward one of his two entrances. “Who’s that?” he demanded suspiciously.

There was a scrape, and Chuck dropped down into Harry’s hidden corner, ducking under the pipes. “Harry . . .” he said.

After a doubtful glare at Chuck, the workman began to deal out the cards. He was not friendly.

“No, sir,” he responded, shaking his head. “No, sir, you get out of here. I’m in all the trouble I ever want to have cuz of you.” He plunked down the cards with loud snaps.

Chuck stepped to the table and handed him a photograph. “Is that Frenchy?”

Harry stopped dealing. Slowly the hand with the deck sank to the tabletop. For once Harry’s eyes opened wide from their habitual squint. “My God! What happened to him?” He took the picture and examined it.

“Somebody killed him.”

The Delos workman shook his head, denying the reality of it. “I don’t know why they would do that. He never hurt *any*body.” A sob rose in his voice and he rubbed the back of his hand across his nose.

“What was Frenchy’s job here?” Chuck asked, sinking into a dilapidated chair.

Harry gulped, rubbed at his nose again, staring at the photo. Frenchy had the deflated, slack, motionless look of death. Human death, not the non-functioning “death” of the lifelike robots.

“He worked same as me,” he said slowly. “Then he had a run-in with that Dr. Schneider one day and he up and quit. Or he got fired. I never did know which it was.”

Chuck tapped the table. “He called me before he was killed. Said he had a big story about Delos. Do you know what he was talking about?”

Harry nibbled at his lips. His eyes slithered from the photo to Chuck, then back again. He put down the photograph with careful fingers and smoothed it on the tabletop.

“Do you?” Chuck persisted.

“Maybe . . .” Harry mumbled.

“What?”

Harry did not answer. He ran his fingers over the edges of the photograph, smoothing the print.

“Harry,” Chuck said intently, “do you think they’ll treat *you* any

better . . . ?”

Without looking up, Harry began: “Clark, get me my binoculars.” He shoved back from the table and stood. He bit at his lip, his eyes still on the morgue photo of Frenchy. “I . . . I guess this could cost me my job.” He was silent a moment and Chuck gave him time. The bearded workman sighed. “But the way things are, it don’t look like I have much of a future, anyways. Come on.” He gestured at the reporter and reached for the binoculars Clark was holding out to him. “Come on,” he repeated, walking under the pipes toward the concrete tunnel. He mumbled to Chuck, “I got something to show you.”

Then Harry paused, and squinted back at Clark. “Don’t you touch them cards!” he admonished.

When the sounds of their passage had faded, Clark moved. He shuffled forward and gently lifted one corner of Harry’s hand to sneak a peek. Satisfied, he returned to his former position and remained motionless.

• • •

Their shoes made little splashes in the paper-thin pools of water along the concrete tunnel floor; and Harry urged Chuck along at a brisk pace, almost unconcerned for the darkness that hid so many dangerous pipes and projections.

"You know," Harry said, "there used to be a couple dozen maintenance men in each world. Watch out for that—"

"Ow!"

"—pipe. Now, it's all machines, except for me and a couple others. Everything changed when they brought out the seven hundreds."

"Changed *how?"* Chuck asked.

Harry shrugged. "This way," he said, taking them down a cross-tunnel. "They're different, that's all," he continued. "They think too much."

"You don't mean they . . . think for themselves?"

Harry shook his head. "Naw. They're just iron, like the rest of 'em. Watch that valve there. Naw, they don't go nowhere or do nothing unless they're programmed to, but . . ." He paused in his words but kept walking.

"But they worry you," Chuck finished for him.

Harry didn't respond. A few steps farther on, he pointed ahead. "It's right up here."

They reached a ladder that led up into the dark and Harry started climbing at once. His binoculars banged nosily against the steel rungs and he cursed softly, leaning back as he climbed.

Harry helped pull Chuck out onto a dimly lit area with a short row of windows along one side. The area was a dead space, dark and dusty, but when Harry pointed outside the room, through the grating over one of the windows, Chuck knew why they had come here.

The area beyond was large, painted black, and with a wide blue door to one side. A strange machine was just coming through the doorway as Chuck pressed himself to the grating. Chuck could see burly Delos guards immediately inside the door, but there appeared to be none outside. The door closed behind the machine.

"Where are we?" Chuck asked.

"Used to be dead inventory. I don't know what it is now." He pointed at the blue door. "But that's the only door in Delos I can't get open. Only ones who get in are seven hundreds."

All at once, Harry grabbed at the reporter's arm, his eyes rolling upward, and Chuck heard the sounds of footsteps patrolling on the

cement ceiling.

Evidently there's a walkway overhead, Chuck guessed.

The steps moved along and Chuck raised himself up—above the grating—and peered out through an opening in the room's ceiling. A model-seven-hundred robot was walking down some steps and Chuck realized they must be under some sort of loading dock.

Harry leaned closely, his hands clasping the binoculars. "Watch!" he whispered. "Write down what I tell you." He focused the binoculars as Chuck sought a pen and a paper in his pockets.

Through the field glasses Harry saw clearly the complex lock on the blue door. Something that looked like an oscilloscope was set into the door; below were ten numbered buttons and green, red, and yellow switches. The robot who had walked overhead now reached out and began to punch numbers, which appeared large on the oscilloscope, spelled out in lines of dots.

"Okay, ready?" Harry breathed. "Seven . . . nine . . . two . . . one . . . one, again . . . nine . . . Um, red . . . green . . . and red."

They heard a click, saw a light flash into the face of the robot, followed by a motor's hum. The door began to open. All of the several robots now left the black-painted room.

Harry squatted next to Chuck and jerked a thumb toward the door. "You wanna try it later?"

"Do *you* want to try it?" Chuck asked in return.

Harry shrugged. "Hell, I've already tried it a dozen times. I just can't get it open."

"One more time?"

"Well, all right," Harry answered grimly.

He pulled out a screwdriver from his belt kit and in a few deft movements had loosened the grating above the window. Jumping up, he slid through with practiced ease, slipping forward for a short distance on his belly.

Chuck inched out behind him and they both crept along the loading dock to the wall with the blue door. The reporter saw Harry motion to stay low, and then he noticed the tiny, ruby laser beam. They slithered under it and stood up. Afterward, Harry rapidly tiptoed to the door, Chuck directly behind him.

Chuck pulled out the scrap of paper and read the numbers and colors off to Harry. "Seven . . . nine . . . two . . . one . . . one . . . nine. Red . . . green . . . red That's it."

Harry threw the last red switch and they heard a click. A light flashed on, striking Harry in the face. He flinched and squinted. Then, after a moment, the light went out. Nothing else happened. The door

did not open.

Harry grimaced. “I *told* you! Let’s go!” he warned, and started running back toward their hole.

Chuck whirled and started after him as Harry threw himself to the concrete floor and slid under the laser alarm beam. The lanky newspaperman managed to stop his headlong dash in order to fall to the floor and wriggle under the beam. He rolled over and jumped briskly to his feet.

A sound of footsteps—not their own—echoed hollowly, coming closer with every second.

Harry dove for the hole under the loading dock and scrambled through. Chuck dropped to the floor and writhed through feet first. Harry had jumped back up and was holding up the grating. As soon as the reporter was through, he jammed it back into the opening and pressed it tight breathing hard. Chuck looked at him with wide eyes while they listened to the nearing footsteps.

A shadow fell across the grating and Harry ceased breathing. Then the footsteps slowly faded away. Harry blew out his lips and fumbled for a screwdriver.

The grating back in position, Harry jerked his thumb backward and they scurried down the ladder into the dark utility tunnel.

A few paces away from the foot of the ladder, Harry stopped. Overhead hung one of the infrequent low-wattage bulbs that fit the tunnels fitfully. Harry leaned against the damp wall while Chuck slumped down on some of the pipes that ran along the floor. The blue-clad workman took out a crumpled package of illegal cigarettes and offered Chuck one.

Chuck shook his head. “No, thanks. Never got the habit.”

Harry lit up and drew in the smoke gratefully, then blew it out, purring. “I *did.* ’Course I’m older ’n you. Started back when I was a kid, long before they outlawed ’em.”

Following a long silence, Harry grumbled, “Damn! Damn!” He took another puff. “I’ve tried that code every damn way I could. I just can’t get it. The numbers are different every day, but—”

Chuck interrupted. “Maybe it’s not the combination that matters.”

“What do you mean?”

Chuck snapped his fingers. “Maybe that’s just window dressing. Why couldn’t it be something personal . . . like . . . like a voiceprint?”

“They don’t say nothin’.”

“Then a . . . a fingerprint?”

Hany looked disgusted. “Hell. Seven hundreds don’t have fingerprints. None of ’em do. They just have this fine texture—so, you

know, their skin feels like real skin! The only way you"—his eyes went wide—"the only way you can tell 'em apart is their *eyes!"* He grinned at Chuck. *"That's it!* It's in their eyes. That light reads the circuit in their eyeballs!" He threw down his cigarette and stamped on it. "Damn, come on! We've got some huntin' to do."

Harry grabbed Chuck's arm roughly and they dashed off, their shoes splashing right through the wet circles on the tunnel floor.

• • •

New arrivals were ooh-ing and ahh-ing their way through the large reception area and tired, wearily smiling guests were leaving. Duffy and Schneider flanked Tracy as they walked past them down the red-carpeted hall to the living quarters area.

"I hope you'll accept my apologies for Chuck Browning's behavior," Tracy ventured. "I'm afraid he's over-trained for a simple story like Delos."

Duffy made a gesture of dismissal. "Oh, we're not worried. I'm sure he'll turn up sooner or later."

Tracy brightened. "I find that man Harry an interesting character, however. I'm sure I'll want to use him on the show."

Duffy smiled indulgently. "Harry's one of our old boys—one of our original maintenance men. Helped with the original construction, too, I believe."

Mort Schneider spoke up, his voice harder than Duffy's practiced public-relations smoothness. "Mr. Duffy feels sorry for him, but, frankly, I think Harry should have been phased out long ago."

"Oh. Why is that?" Tracy asked.

"His skills are no longer needed," the scientist said somewhat haughtily. "Our seven hundreds can do things better."

They were approaching an elevator.

Duffy protested mildly. "Now, Mort, that's not *entirely* true. We haven't solved the problem of wet areas. Harry's still quite valuable."

Tracy looked from one man to the other. "Anyway, don't you think it might be dangerous to rely too much on your robots? Aren't you afraid something may go wrong again?"

Schneider's head jerked up and he looked at Tracy with a set of hard, glittering eyes. "Not at all."

"How can you be so sure?" Tracy asked. "Murphy's Law, remember. If anything can go wrong, it will—and at the worst possible time!"

Schneider spoke sternly, his brows dark and angry. "Our *four*-hundred series were only toys—and of course toys can break," he said,

dismissing the tragedy of the Westworld debacle. “Our seven-hundreds are perfect. Now, if you’ll excuse me . . .”

He broke away abruptly and stalked off. Tracy watched him go, a bemused expression on her face.

• • •

A seven-hundred series robot passed under the sign CONTROL ROOM, CHAMBER B and stepped into a complex of pipes, tubes, switches, cables, panels, and other machinery. He moved arrogantly, carrying a clipboard, his eyes like eagles as they checked dials and gauges.

Harry stepped out from behind a transducer panel and called, “Hey Iron Pants.”

“What?” the robot said, turning.

Harry threw a bucket of water into the robot’s face. The arrogant stance disintegrated and the seven hundred acted as if he had been struck by a club. Dazed, he staggered and wobbled. His arms moved erratically, flinging the clipboard against the maze of pipes, where it rattled and clattered. The robot jerked finally to a halt, his back bent and his head up. His arms quivered and one shoulder twitched.

Harry moved calmly and confidently forward, pulling out a screwdriver. Grabbing the robot around the neck, he jammed the tool into the robot’s back. A sizzle of sparks exploded, and a small flash and the robot fell like a puppet whose strings were cut.

The squint-eyed workman knelt down as the robot gave one last shiver. Without emotion, Harry pulled the dead robot over on its back. He took out a special tool and placed it at several spots on the edges of the robot’s face. With a faint click, he took hold of the nose and pulled the creature’s face off.

The blue-clad maintenance man flipped the faceplate over and stared at it something like Hamlet contemplating the skull of Yorick. The eyeballs were within the faceplate unit and Harry checked them for damage. Then he rose and walked away, leaving the rest of the robot where it lay.

• • •

Tracy came into their suite as Chuck emerged from the downstairs bedroom. He waved airily at her. “Hi, Socks. How’s your love life?”

Tracy gazed at him open-mouthed. “Where have you *been?* I’ve been stalling Duffy for *hours*—going over the same ground, looking at the same things, and trying to come up with new questions!”

Chuck waved a hand at her bedroom. “You’d better go up and pack

your bag. I've got a feeling we're going to be, in a hurry when we leave."

Tracy looked alertly at him. "What did you find out?"

"I'll tell you while you pack," he said. They climbed the stairs together and Chuck continued: "There's a secret area where only seven hundreds are allowed. We're going to try to break in tonight."

They ambled into Tracy's bedroom and she opened dresser drawers and started to put her clothes into a suitcase. "Where you go, I go," she announced.

Chuck shrugged and leaned against the wall by the door. "Well . . . okay."

She threw two dresses into the suitcase, then pulled them out and started to fold them properly. Her glance went to Chuck and she flushed slightly. "I haven't seen you since . . . uh . . . Did you like my dream?"

"It was a little slow in the beginning."

She gave him another glance. "You mean you weren't jealous?"

He smiled faintly. "Was that the idea?"

"Not exactly . . ." She gave him another quick look and became slightly more rosy-faced. "Anyway, I don't *have* to dream about you."

"Why not?" Chuck asked.

She threw some final articles into the suitcase, slammed it shut, and set it on the floor. Going over to Chuck, she put her arms around his neck. "Because I can have you when I'm wide awake."

"Just like that, huh?"

"Yep."

"You think I'm a pushover?"

"You bet!"

She kissed him and then grabbed him to wheel him around. He yelled, then laughed as she pushed him over onto the bed. They bounced, kissed, and then whooped and chuckled.

"How much time do we have?" Tracy asked.

"All we need," Chuck mumbled, tipping up her chin to plant a kiss on her mouth.

• • •

The glow in the Red Room bathed all the technicians in an eerie light. The scores of screens, dials, and readout panels glowed in shifting colors. Some monitors showed anatomical information with grids superimposed. Others showed tables, charts, and statistical input. Some flashed thermal vision photography, others blinked a changing

mosaic of graphic readouts. Some presented biological information in various forms: computer simulation, graphic presentations, bar charts, superimposed comparisons, and so on.

*"Are you running correlations on organic emissions?"* one technician asked into his microphone.

*"I have resonance frequencies on the protein molecules."*

*"Electromagnetic shaping positive,"* a nearby technician reported aloud. *"Sesquipedalian level rising."*

*"Beta-Two, phase Eight, at Omicron-positive."*

*"Twelve-fourteen, Gamma-Five-Two, at grennell-fifty mark."*

*"Proceed Zeta-One."*

Schneider surveyed his domain of crimson-lit equipment, then his attention returned to the single large monitor before him; it was manned by a seven-hundred technician. A ghost-like figure was forming in the monitor—a computer-generated simulation of what was happening elsewhere in a closed cylinder. It seemed to coalesce out of a blinking starfield of scattered particles.

*"Subject Beta-Two energy matrix readout is particulating now . . . Mark!"*

*"Beta-Two matrix at D.A.G. level, F.E.R. tab four."*

*"Check."*

The ghost-figure on the screen writhed and twisted, growing and becoming more definite. Alpha numerals blinked across the bottom of the screen. The glowing field around the humanoid figure that was forming was not unlike the sac that encloses a fetus.

*"Nevus mark at one."*

*"Transmit."*

The ghost-figure grew . . .

And grew . . .

A grid sporadically checked the growth superimposed upon the screen. Blinking numbers and flickering Greek letters trailed across, too.

*"Subject Beta-Two approaching steffan E-Two . . ."*

*"Graef Five-Five-Five-Kay! . . ."*

*"Rausa at Two-Two-Five . . ."*

*"Acknowledged . . ."*

*"Organic temperature rising . . ."*

*"Switch Kurland Process to general Calkins-field One-Five-Four . . ."*

*"Acknowledged . . ."*

The ghost-shape was no longer ghostly. It was crude, but becoming

more detailed with each passing second.

*"Cloning at terminal minus ten . . ."*

*"Acknowledged . . ."*

*". . . Nine . . . eight . . . seven . . ."*

Mort Schneider's eyes glittered redly, reflecting off the crimson-tinted consoles.

*". . . Clone complete . . ."*

*"Terminate Beta-Two process . . ."*

*"Acknowledged . . ."*

Schneider's frown vanished. The clone looked just like Chuck Browning.

• • •

Chuck, Tracy and Harry watched through the grating as the long line of silent seven hundreds passed through the blue door. They could see the guards inside the next room. The door closed behind the last of the exiting robots. The three humans waited until the footsteps had faded and all was empty and quiet in the black-painted chamber.

Then Harry's screwdriver appeared again.

In moments, the grating lay on the floor and the maintenance man slithered out first to look around. He waved his hand impatiently at Chuck and the tall newspaperman began to hand out to him two pieces of equipment.

The first thing Harry pulled up were a pair of welder's goggles, to which the realistic eyes of the dead seven hundred had been fastened. The next item was a fire extinguisher to which straps had been added so that it might be carried over the shoulder.

Chuck now made a step with his hands, and Tracy slipped up and out onto the floor of the room. He grabbed the edge and heaved himself up and out. Grabbing the extinguisher, he fit his arms into the straps as Harry pulled the goggles over his head.

"There's two guards right inside the door," the workman reminded them in a whisper. "If we get it open, you hit 'em with the water and I'll finish 'em off," he said, slapping the tools in his belt kit.

Tracy's eyes blinked. "You—you mean *kill* them?"

Chuck nudged her. "Come on, Socks, they're only machines."

Her chin trembled a bit. "I think that's . . . terrible."

Harry looked disgusted. Impatiently he leaned to her and hissed angrily: "Lady, you got a vacuum cleaner at home?"

She looked at him in amazement. "What's that got to do with anything?"

"Next time you pull its plug," he said nastily, "why don't you call the cops and confess?"

Then he turned away from her and the three crawled along the floor as, with hand signals, Harry warned them of the laser alarm. Once under it, they rose to their feet and stood against the jet-colored wall.

Harry moved quickly to the door. Pulling the goggles down from his forehead to cover his eyes, he took out of his jumper the slip of paper with the combination on it and began punching the buttons. Chuck and Tracy glanced around, checking for possible interference, and Chuck prepared the hose that ran from the extinguisher on his back.

Harry gave them a goggly-eyed look and threw the last red switch. A click sounded; the light went on and shone brightly on Harry's improvised goggles.

The moment seemed to stretch forever.

Then came a hum, and the door began to open.

Immediately Harry extracted a screwdriver from his belt kit, palmed it against his forearm, and stood waiting. Tracy and Chuck hugged the wall.

Inside, the two guards turned toward the open door. One of them looked at Harry and demanded: "Who are you?" Starting to pull his gun, the robot warned, "You're not allowed in here."

Chuck stepped around the open door as the second guard went for his gun. A powerful stream of water shot out from the hose in the reporter's hand. He quickly splashed one, then another; and both reacted as the robot Harry had destroyed had done. They staggered and lost balance. Their guns clattered to the floor and their limbs went into an uncontrollable twitch. In an instant, Harry ran to the first one; but he had a hard time grabbing him properly because the robot was twisting and jerking. Impatiently, Chuck decked the other with a solid right, then swore as he nursed a hurt fist.

Meanwhile, Harry found the proper spot and the first robot collapsed in a shower of sparks.

"Get his gun!" Harry shouted as he dove for the robot Chuck had downed. "Get it! We may need 'em!"

The bearded maintenance man flipped over the second twitching guard and expertly finished him off, showering himself with sparks in the process. He got up, brushing at the sparks automatically, as Chuck retrieved the fallen gun.

"Did you *have* to do that?" Tracy asked from the door, her face expressing vivid distaste.

"Damn it, lady!" Harry said with a calm rage, "this is no game. Water only stops them for a few seconds. They got heaters and

dispersers and stuff, 'n' insulation. If you don't finish 'em *then,* they'll kill you for sure."

Tracy stepped through the blue door as Chuck slipped out of the fixe extinguisher's straps and set it down. "But—but—" she stammered, still angry. "I mean, aren't all robots supposed to have these—these—*laws* they can't break? I mean, not harm humans, and stuff like that."

Harry snorted. "Sure. The Three Laws of Robotics." He shook his head. "That's science fiction, lady. The laws are only there if whoever builds them *puts* them there, you unnerstan'?" He waved around at Delos. "And they din't get put there!"

The impact of the thought that at least these robots—if not *all* Delos's contingent—were not programmed not to kill humans struck both Chuck and Tracy at once. They exchanged horrified glances, speechless for a moment or two. Then Chuck noticed something that brought his thoughts back to more pressing realities.

"I bet *that's* what we're looking for," he said, pointing.

The Dead Inventory section—for it was in just that room, a sign announced, that they found themselves—was huge, with old pieces of equipment of all types lying about. Some items were small, some large, and most were sheet-shrouded—with narrow aisles between. The flat surfaces reflected a pulsating red light that came from a bright plastic bubble high up one wall, over a second blue door reached by a wide iron staircase.

Harry stooped and picked up the first sentry's gun, checked it, and used it to point toward the stairs. He went first, followed by Chuck, and then the reluctant Tracy. She gave the two dead robots a last, shuddering look and strode after the two men.

Harry reached the azure-colored entrance at the head of the steps, tried the handle, then grinned fiercely back at Chuck. They gripped their guns and slowly pushed open the door.

Harry stuck his head into a short hallway lined with windows. Stepping in, he noted that a control room flanked each side of the hall; both manned by a number of active seven hundreds, he could see through the windows. He ducked down at once, motioning to Chuck and Tracy. They dropped to their hands and knees, crawled into the hallway and closed the door behind them.

Harry had noticed that the window at the end of the hall, facing into the control room on the right, was partially blocked. Some piece of equipment had obviously been leaned against the window, or had fallen against it, to create a narrow, triangular peephole. Through it, they might peer cautiously into the room without being seen. He motioned briskly to the two reporters to creep over to the window.

The three stared into a wide room, trapezoid-shaped, its walls, ceiling, and parts of its floor space crowded with a forest of dark, spear-shaped projections.

Harry uttered a gasp. "Lookit that!" he whispered.

In the center of the odd room, four giant pyramids reached toward the ceiling far overhead. At the base of each pyramid were clusters of programming instruments manned by technicians. Cables ran from the consoles to the tops of the pyramids, where, in two of the four an individual now sat in a chair with a steel cap over his head. Wires cascaded down into boxes and cabinets behind the chair.

Chuck thought the nearest figure looked familiar. "Hey—that's Karnovsky!" he stammered.

Tracy crowded close. "It *can't* be!" she exclaimed, then lowered her voice to a whisper. "Oh, Chuck! Look! Isn't that—?"

"Takaguchi," Chuck finished for her.

Harry pointed. "Hey, look over there by the door! Who's that with Doc Schneider?"

The two reporters looked, and their jaws dropped. With Schneider were "Tracy" and "Chuck." They saw him lead the two figures to the base of the huge cones that were empty.

"My . . . God!" Tracy said in a hollow voice. "I—I don't believe it. W-what *are* . . . they?"

Chuck turned away from the window and sank to the floor. Harry and Tracy joined him. "They're . . . they're duplicates—something called 'clones,' " he explained, breathless with horror. As he grew calmer, he continued: "Or *types* of clones. *Real* clones take time to grow—from a single, stolen human cell, all the way to that full human once again. The 'growing' is done either in a womb or in some non-human 'container' that resembles a womb. *These* clones have been made faster, obviously, and not by the same process. How, I don't know." He glanced at the floor pensively. "But they *have* been created, and are now being *programmed,* to be completely like their human counterparts." He paused. "Perhaps not *completely.* Something essential must be different—otherwise, why make these duplicates?"

"Chuck . . . ?" Tracy's voice was weak. "What's the difference between clones and robots?"

"From what I've read, it's this: robots are programmed to do only certain things—and just *can't* do others. And of course they're only mechanisms, inside. Clones, well, are *complete* human beings, inside and out. And, I suppose, they can be programmed to a great extent, too, like the robots. They'd be . . . much more dangerous, I think."

Chuck glanced over at Harry. *"That's* what Frenchy's list meant. All

those politicians, generals, executives, commissars . . . they've been replaced by these . . . these *things!"*

Tracy blinked. "But where are the real people?"

"They never left Delos," Chuck replied. "And, knowing the good Dr. Schneider, I'm sure they're dead."

Tracy looked around her. "We've got to tell someone!"

"Like who?" Harry asked blandly.

"How about Duffy?" Chuck suggested, seriously.

"How about him?" Harry squinted.

"Can we trust him?" Chuck asked.

Harry paused. "I don't know . . . Maybe."

Chuck got into a crouching position and extended a hand to Tracy. "Well, the first thing we'd better do is get the hell out of here!"

• • •

Mort Schneider's eyes glittered in appreciation of the perfection of his methods. He stared around the big anechoic chamber with its sound-deadening spear-shaped protrusions covering the walls and ceiling, and even portion of the floor, and watched the technicians at work programming and checking the clones.

*"Beta-Nine, state your name, birthplace, and date."*

From the top of one of the pyramids the clone-Karnovsky spoke in heavily accented English. "Petr Ivanovich Karnovsky, the Union Republic of Kazakh, the city of Alma-Ata, in 1892."

*"Beta-Five, state the name and birthplace of your mother."*

The speaker had a perfect Takaguchi voice. "Hoshi Takama, the city of Biratori on the island of Hokkaido."

*"Beta-Two, state your first job of any description."*

Chuck's voice was transmitted from his position in the chair atop the cone. "Box boy at Safeway Market"

*"Your second job, please."*

"Messenger for Arrow Delivery Service."

*"Beta-Three, prepare to receive Level Four information on your personal hygiene habits . . ."*

*"Beta-Nine, how did you achieve the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Russian Army?"*

"My superior was Colonel Gregor Bohassian. I convinced him to switch mistresses. The new woman was under my control and I managed to obtain irrefutable documentation of his deviation from Party policy."

*“Beta-Five, what are your ship-building interests?”*

“At Yokohama, the Takaguchi Ship-Building Works. At Tokyo, the Kawaguchi Marine Company. At Tamamatsu, the Fukuyama Chandlers, the Takaguchi Marine Supply Corporation, and the Nampo Ship Company.”

*“Beta-Two, review your Alpha-Niner-Two-Two program.”*

“Hi, there. I’m Chuck Browning, the devil-may-care reporter you all know and love. My stuff is I.M.C.’s best, no two words alike, written so you can read and understand every word. Last year, news fans will remember, I busted the organ-transplant story, covered the George Barr fake-portrait case, the Roger Lane Wood murder case, and the Carol Randall kidnapping story. But my biggest story was probably the Westworld mess, which—”

*“Terminate.”*

*“Beta-Three, how did you become a television news reporter? Reply on Alpha-Eight-One-Two program level.”*

“Why, of course. Glad to oblige any fan. I was just a newsreader, nothing big, you understand, on a little two-by-four cable TV channel in the Bay Area, but I stumbled into the bizarre sex-circle story in Oakland. Really juicy stuff, involving some of the biggest names in—”

*“Terminate, Beta-Three. Preview your Phi-Six-Six-One-Alpha program.”*

“Phi-Six-Six-One-Alpha, check. Zetetic ratio: Seven. Cutaneous factor: Ten on the C-Alpha scale, three on the C-Beta scale. Mesochroic coloration unsuitable. Beta-Beta-Nine-Four-Tau. Metagraphy factor: Negative one, as specified. Dicrotic linear-Beta, Seven-Four—”

*“Terminate, Beta-Three.”*

Schneider picked up a microphone and switched into the interrogation of the “Tracy” in the cone. “Tracy Ballard.”

“Yes?”

“This is Dr. Mort Schneider. How are you today?”

“Just fine, Doctor. Will this take much longer? I really should be reporting in to I.M.C. with the first draft proposal for the show, you know.”

“All in good time, my dear, all in good time.” He put down the microphone and spoke briefly to the technician. “Proceed, but double-check the mendacious factor programming.”

“Yes, sir. *Beta-Three, review your Kappa-One program.”*

“Me? Lie? Why, sir, I’ll remind you that my entire career is based upon my complete honesty and . . .”

Schneider left the room. As much as he ever did, he was smiling.

• • •

Chuck and Tracy again followed Harry through the wet tunnels, ducking overhead pipes and occasional valves. The water here was deeper and their feet were soaked.

Chuck hefted his gun as they stopped for a brief break. “What time is it now?” he asked.

Harry shifted the gun in his hand to shove back his sleeve and squint at his wristwatch. “Zero-five-thirty.”

“There’s a plane leaving in three hours,” Chuck said significantly.

“What are you thinking about?” Tracy inquired.

“I think we ought to go back to our room, make a reservation, get our bags, and be on that plane,” Chuck replied.

“What about Duffy?”

“We’ll call him from the airport.”

Harry squinted at them. “You know your way back from here?”

Chuck nodded.

“Okay,” the bearded workman responded. “You better not wait too long in your room,” he advised. “I don’t think it’s safe. You meet me at the power plant in . . . um . . . half an hour. I’ll find us a place to hide until about time the plane leaves.”

“All right,” Chuck said, “but if we don’t show up at the plant, you get out any way you can!”

Harry slapped him on the shoulder. “Good luck!”

He glanced over at Tracy, then ducked his head away and scurried into the dimness of a side tunnel. Chuck hefted his gun and looked at his companion. She sighed and they started down a tunnel in the opposite direction.

• • •

The tall, brown-haired newsman stuck his head into the front door of their suite and looked around; then he motioned for Tracy to come in.

She went right to the stairs and started up. “It won’t take me a minute. I only want to change these wet shoes.”

In two long strides Chuck was at the telephone. “I’ll call the airlines,” he called back to her. “Then I’ll try to get Holcombe at I.M.C. and lay out what’s happened for him.” He dropped into a chair, set the gun by the phone, and picked up the handset; he punched three numbers. “Hello, this is Mr. Browning. I want to make reservations for three people on your eight-thirty a.m. flight today . . . Yes, to Los Angeles . . . Thank you.”

Chuck pushed the button down and lifted his finger to punch a single number. “Yes. I want to make a person-to-person call to Arthur

Holcombe . . . International Media Corporation . . . Yes, I.M.C. . . . The number is Seven-Two-Five . . . Four-Five-Two . . . Eight-Eight-Six-Nine-Six . . . Yes, I'll wait—"

A voice from the door said mildly, "Put the phone down, Chuck."

Chuck glanced up in surprise. Duffy stood in the open door, a gun in his hand.

The reporter put the receiver down carefully. The gun was only a few feet away, and Duffy held his weapon with a steady sureness that thoroughly disconcerted Chuck.

"You're a part of it," Chuck said to Duffy, his eyes fixed on the weapon.

"Yes, of course I am." He looked around the living room. "Now where's Miss Ballard?"

Chuck waved vaguely, indicating somewhere outside. He let his voice rise a little as he answered, "She's with Harry. They're . . . they're supposed to meet me here."

Still holding the gun steady on Chuck, Duffy mounted the staircase. Shoving open the bedroom door, he gave the room a quick search.

Chuck was tense, his hand ready to reach for his own gun: he felt sure that the phone and a small piece of Futur Sculpt had hidden it from Duffy. He watched the Delos representative closely. When he goes in to get Tracy, I'll—

But Duffy turned away from the open door and came back down the steps. "I suppose it's possible that occasionally even a newspaper reporter tells the truth. We'll just wait for them here."

With no change of expression, Duffy walked over and took Chuck's gun from the table, pocketing it. Satisfied that he was secure he sauntered across the deep-pile carpet to the piano. He stood there, eyeing Chuck without speaking. Then with a free hand he struck a few notes on the instrument with his finger. He was relaxed, informal, and almost friendly—an attitude that annoyed Chuck.

Is he so confident that no matter what I do, he can handle it? Chuck wondered.

"Why are you doing this?" the reporter asked after a minute or two.

"Oh, it should be obvious." Duffy shrugged, plunking a few more notes. "If you'd read your own newspaper more carefully, you would understand our position quite easily . . ."

• • •

A floor above, Tracy slipped out from under the bed, where she had been hiding since she had heard Duffy enter the suite. Crossing now to the doorway, she peered anxiously downstairs. Duffy was pecking out a simple little melody. He stopped momentarily.

"The human being is a very unstable, irrational, and violent animal, Mr. Browning. All our probability studies indicate that, if left alone, he will destroy much of this planet before the end of the decade. There are several scenarios, but they all end in the same manner: overpopulation, famine, war . . . mad leaders who push the red button . . . nuclear destruction by design or by accident . . . a global destruction of resources beyond anything seen before . . . war for religious or ethnic reasons . . . even a kind of lemming-like madness that catapults the human race into annihilation . . ."

He paused and looked grimly at the young newspaperman. "However we look at it, the end is the same. We at Delos are determined to see that doesn't happen. We do not intend to be destroyed by *your* mistakes!"

Chuck looked at him for a long moment. "So you replace human leaders with . . . your own duplicates."

"Yes," Duffy replied decisively. "With duplicates who are programmed to think first of the welfare of Delos and who accept our instructions."

Chuck frowned. "But . . . why Tracy? Or myself?"

The Delos representative waved a free hand, the gun still rock-steady on his listener. "Because we need favorable publicity to attract the top rank of human leadership. The stories your duplicates create will guarantee that every chief of state will soon be among our guests." He held up a finger. "Religious leaders, as well. And leaders who do not appear to be leaders, of course: business executives, certain writers, actors, producers . . . a few very carefully selected song writers, performers, record-company executives." Duffy smiled very faintly. "And, of course, the so-called 'godfathers' of organized crime. Top police officials, too. And even certain comedians, who can sway millions with a jest, a quip, an insult . . ."

The younger man shook his head. "You can't possibly succeed."

Duffy straightened and moved into the center of the room. "We can and we will," he pronounced with great determination, as if trying to convince Chuck by force of his willpower. "Don't imagine that the duplicates we have created are mere robots! They aren't machines. They are electrochemical beings produced by the genetic instructions

contained in your own cells.” His hard mouth softened very slightly “Even those of us who create them can’t tell you apart.” He waved the gun for the first time. “That, of course, is why we are obliged to destroy the *originals.”*

Chuck was starting to argue with this, but caught out of the corner of his eye a movement at the top of the stairs. It was Tracy, holding her suitcase over her head. Duffy detected the change in Chuck’s look and had begun to turn, but she had already hurled the luggage with all her force.

The suitcase hit Duffy as he turned, and, Chuck lunged up out of the chair. But the Delos leader was only staggered and the two men began to struggle. Duffy’s gun fell, however, and Chuck kicked it toward Tracy, who was by now racing down the stairs.

“Uh!” Chuck granted from a blow that rocked him. The older man was amazingly strong and agile and his vigor was, in effect, driving Chuck back. The reporter took another blow that bent him double, but he recovered in time to give Duffy a few hard rights and a good left.

“Tracy!” he called out. “Get the gun!”

Duffy struck at him while groping for Chuck’s gun, which he had put in his pocket. Luckily for the reporter, the hammer and sights of the weapon had become entangled in the lining of Duffy’s pocket, ripping away but not giving Duffy a good grip on the gun. Tracy swept up the revolver, meanwhile, but stood uncertainly, holding it awkwardly.

Chuck grasped Duffy’s hand with both of his, forcing the gun back into his pocket. Duffy struck out, nevertheless, with his other hand, rocking Chuck with two smashing blows.

“Tracy! I can’t hold him. Shoot!”

She stood trembling, then slowly she raised the gun. But could do no more than aim shakily.

Duffy now smashed Chuck backward, then ripped the gun from his pocket. He lost his grip, however, and the gun skittered across the floor to slide to a stop beneath the piano. But as Chuck charged in again, Duffy smashed him in the chest.

The reporter fell, coughing. “You’ll have to shoot!” he screamed at Tracy.

She seemed in a daze. The muzzle of the gun drooped.

“Tracy! For God’s sake—*shoot!”*

Duffy scrambled under the piano for his gun, turned while he was still in a crouch, and started to aim.

Trembling, Tracy fired.

With a burst of flame, the bullet streaked across the room like an

incendiary rocket, striking Duffy just as he rose and tipping the piano over in a tinkling crash. The force of the blow had driven Duffy back against the tipped piano, and now his chest was in flames. Rising to his feet, his arm moved jerkily about, his gun extended at arm's length.

Chuck scrambled to his feet and grabbed the gun away from the stunned Tracy. Taking quick aim, he fired twice.

Again, the rocket-like flame shot across the room.

The first projectile hit Duffy in the chest with an explosion of sparks. The second struck him in the lower body, bursting into flames thunderously.

Duffy halted, motionless. His eyes blinked . . . glittered . . . and his face and body froze for several long moments. Then, with a jerk, a gush of new flame from his chest, his mouth fell open and blood oozed between his teeth.

From his mouth a deep, extended moan came out, something like a phonograph running at an increasingly slower speed. Then it lost volume and faded. Duffy's mouth was still open, but made no sound. Slowly, slowly, he began to fall, hitting the floor heavily and rocking the ruined piano.

Something else began to seep out of his body; it was not blood.

It was silvery, a metallic fluid something like mercury. Whatever it was, it was certainly nothing that should flow out of a human being.

Tracy stared, her lips trembling, horrified. But Chuck, limping and holding his side painfully, shuffled over and picked up a pair of ice tongs from the bar; returning, he bent down over Duffy's body. Tracy's eyes widened in even greater horror as she saw him jab the tongs into the side of Duffy's face. He thrust them deep, making a terrible rip, then seized the skin and gave a mighty rip. His shoulders jerked and he almost fell over backward from his squat.

Tracy screamed. The skin had been torn raggedly from Duffy's face.

Where his face had been was a complex package of circuits, molecular blocks, wiring, and the printed circuitry that packed a robot's skull.

Chuck sat back and looked up at Tracy. "They're *all* robots. *All of them*—except the 'clones' and the guests. Somehow . . . these human 'machines' have developed themselves—we might even say *evolved*—on their own, each generation of robots improving, passing on the improvements to the next generation—swiftly, as fast as they could build them. Duffy was a robot, programmed to promote and protect Delos; I doubt that he had any real human feelings. Probably most of the 'clones' are out in the world at large, except for those still being

produced here. As for Schneider . . . well, I don't know what *he* is . . ."

Tracy gulped. "What do we do now?"

"We can't stay *here* till the plane leaves."

Tracy blinked, then gestured to the outside. "What about Westworld? That's deserted. They probably don't even have monitors there."

Chuck stood up, throwing the ragged piece of "flesh" he held to the floor, where it seeped into the carpet. "You're right. I'll take you there, then go get Harry. Maybe we can hole up until Holcombe tries to reach us or the flight departs." He lurched painfully toward the door to the suite. "Come on."

As they shut the door behind them, Duffy continued to seep silvery fluid into the beige carpet.

• • •

Clark carried a pile of shirts over to Harry, who took them and stuffed them into a battered valise. Squinting at the faceless robot, he spoke apologetically. "Listen, you know I'd like to take you with me, but it just wouldn' work out. People on the outside, they just wouldn' understand how it is with us . . ."

Harry stood awkwardly, darting a look at the robot. Finally, he walked over to an old carton to pick up Clark's faceplate. Hefting it in his hand, he walked back to the robot and fastened it in place on his head. He ran the sealing tool around the edges as he talked to Clark in a low voice.

"I guess if I'd've fixed your voice box, you would have told me what was going on around here." He ran his thumb over the sealed edge. "There." He grinned through his bristly beard. "You look real good, y'know?"

Harry put his tools back in his belt kit, then unfastened the kit and dropped it on the table. "Listen," he said nervously, "when we get this mess straightened out, I'll be back for you. Don't worry about that. Stay hid down here meanwhile, y'hear?"

The blue-clad worker then hoisted his valise, started to say something, then instead walked silently over to the tunnel. Stopping to look back, he gulped and blinked, trying to get some words out, but gave up and started out into the tunnel. Stopping determinedly, he sighed, then pulled back inside and, without facing the robot, said: "You been a good pal to me. I'm . . . I'm sure gonna miss ya." He paused. "And you watch out for that bad circuit in your arm, y'hear? You gotta be careful now." Harry gave the silent robot a fast look over his shoulder. "Well . . . uh . . . so long, ya bag of bolts. We'll see ya!"

Harry ducked into the tunnel. Clark did not move.

When the sounds of the workman's echoing passage had faded, Clark slowly, slowly turned away and covered his face with his hands.

• • •

Chuck and Tracy had climbed up the rungs of the "gopher hole" and the tall reporter shoved up on the warped trapdoor. It fell back with a rattling crash and instinctively they ducked and remained motionless. After the dust had settled, Chuck carefully looked over the edge of this unorthodox entrance to one of Westworld's hotel. It seemed just as he had seen it last: burnt and dusty, ruined and silent.

He climbed out and helped Tracy up and they moved cautiously through the blackened lobby and looked out into the empty and still dark Western street. The ruts in the street were dry and old, tufts of grass growing in some of them; a tumbleweed had caught on a discarded pitchfork across from Chuck and Tracy. A second saloon sat directly across the street, and Chuck could make out in the moonlight the faded lettering on the clapboard false front: BURBEE'S. Smaller signs advertised: "Golden Beer" and "Ladies Welcome."

Chuck pushed out onto the worn boardwalk and looked around him. A ragged poster for a cockfight flapped in the wind against the hotel wall. The false-fronted stores made sharp-edged shadows in the street. Nothing alive moved.

Chuck motioned Tracy out, then pointed. "Wait up there at the corner, by the jail. I'll get Harry and be right back!"

She put her hand on his arm. "Be careful!"

"Right." He grinned reassuringly, then bent down and kissed her. She threw her arms around him and extended the kiss, but he pulled free and patted her side.

Tracy started up the street and an instant later looked back. Chuck had already disappeared into the burned-out hotel, to roam back down through the maze of tunnels.

• • •

The power plant hummed industriously, its vibrations shaking the floor. Harry loitered in the shadows, even though, as usual, the robot working saw nothing but what they were programmed to see. Nevertheless just to make certain that a seven hundred didn't enter the plant and see him, Harry kept hidden.

He impatiently checked the time and squinted suspiciously at the bustle of the robots tending the furnaces. Stepping out, clutching his valise, he slid along the wall, ducking behind as many pipes and

boilers as he could. Eventually he found a vantage point and squatted, watching the utility-tunnel entrance with nervous eyes.

Finally he looked at his watch again, and started to go back, then made a face and squatted down again. He watched the tunnel entrance but it was empty. Sinking back on his heels, he muttered soundlessly to himself.

"Harry!"

He jerked with surprise and glanced up. Chuck was on some iron stairs above him. The reporter ran quickly down and over to Harry.

"Where's Tracy?" the workman asked, looking beyond the reporter.

"She's safe. C'mon, let's go!"

"Okay," the bearded repairman agreed, and they started toward the tunnels.

Chuck let Harry lead as they crossed the power-plant floor. Then, suddenly and shockingly, the newspaperman jumped ahead to throw a choke hold around Harry's neck.

"Gawk!" the maintenance man croaked, dropping his valise and tugging at the arm encircling his neck.

In an instant, Chuck yanked Harry backward, pulling a knife from under his coat. His hand went high, then plunged the blade into Harry's chest.

Again and again the bloody blade rose and fell, until Harry's shirt was a gushing mass of blood. Chuck then let the body drop, and knelt to roll him over and pluck the blood-flecked gun from the workman's belt.

Chuck ran out of the utility-tunnel entrance and saw himself bending over the limp, crimsoned body of Harry Croft. The murderer looked up, straight into Chuck's eyes. The reporter blinked in surprise and shock, but his eyes widened in alarm as he watched the murderer raise Harry's gun to fire.

Chuck threw himself back, bouncing off the tunnel wall as the rocket propellant sizzled across the room and splashed fire down the tunnel floor. Without waiting for a second shot, he whirled and raced down the tunnel.

"A clone—a cloned *me!"* he gasped as he ran.

The clone-Chuck rose and followed his original into the tunnel at a leisurely pace, grinning slightly.

The reporter could hear the footsteps behind him as he scurried through the dimly lit utility passage. He passed one branching-off tunnel, and almost ran beyond the next, but he braked himself with his hands on the damp wall and backtracked quickly to race down the side-tunnel.

Pausing moments later and breathing heavily, he listened for the pursuit. What he heard was the echoing shout of his clone.

"Don't worry, Chuck. I can always find you!"

He gulped. It was his own voice, the slightly mocking, sometimes snobbish voice he used to deliberately irritate people—as when he wanted to prod them into revealing hidden bits of news or background material. Shoving himself away from the wall he dashed down the tunnel in frantic haste, passing under the scattered dim bulbs.

Seconds later, Chuck's clone appeared, trotting easily, seemingly unhurried, not at all rumpled or sweating. His lengthy strides took him swiftly into the darkness beyond.

• • •

Tracy waited anxiously near the jail, pressed against its rough bricks in deep shadow. She could see a part of the main street and a corner of the rusty sign above the jailhouse door said MARSHAL. Moving to the corner of the building, she once again took a survey of the side-street. Nothing much had changed. The tumbleweed had torn loose from the pitchfork and had blown along to be caught between two empty barrels near the Emporium. On the wall next to her a bulletin board, covered with ragged and torn pieces of paper, mottled by rain and sun, was still readable enough for Tracy to see that it held "wanted" posters, the announcement of an auction of "prime cattle," and another for someone to "ride shotgun" on the Tucson stage.

But the street remained empty.

Tracy moved back into the shade—then started, upright, as she heard footsteps on the boardwalk.

She stepped out cautiously and looked down the narrow street. "Chuck?" Her hand touched the gun at her belt.

She saw a shadowy movement under the projecting porch that sheltered the boardwalk and took a step in that direction.

She stopped.

A figure stepped out into the sun and the figure was herself.

"Hello, Tracy," the clone said.

"You *can't* be . . ." Tracy gasped. Seeing the clone at a distance in the odd-shaped anechoic chamber was one thing, and there always was the possibility of a mistake. But seeing her duplicate a few yards away from her now was unnerving in the extreme.

"But I *am,*" the duplicate said. She seemed calm, confident, and Tracy recognized the mannerisms. It was herself when she was boring in on a story: armed with facts, sure of herself, and eager to go.

“What . . . are you?” she asked the duplicate.

“You!” the smiling Tracy said to the unsmiling one.

Tracy bit at her lip as she studied the figure which was walking toward her slowly. She remembered how people had often said you don’t recognize yourself. All the times when people had told her and some other woman—usually quite cattily—“Darling, you could be sisters!” came back to Tracy, as did all the times she had seen those “other women” and did not think they looked much like her. Staring at the strange yet familiar face, Tracy had a number of peculiar things pop into her head: meeting one of those look-alikes and discussing with her that they had more dissimilarities than similarities; seeing not the familiar and comfortable “mirror image,” but seeing “herself”—the way others saw her. And the other “her” was wearing a gun, too!

Tracy had a moment of panic. She started to turn, but stopped when the other “her” said sharply, “Don’t run there!”

Tracy stared back at the still-advancing duplicate, frowning. *How had she known—?*

The duplicate Tracy told her. “You were going to run to the saloon across the street, hide in the gap between the floorboards and the ground.”

Tracy blinked. “How can you know that?” She *had* been going to do that very thing!

The clone-Tracy shrugged and made the little hand gesture that Tracy knew was one of her own trademarks. The clone spoke easily as she continued to walk toward her, slowly but not reluctantly. “Because I have your mind; and what *you* think, *I* think . . . what *you* know, *I* know.”

The duplicate halted a few paces away. Her hand hung near her gun. “And now, of course, it’s too late for you to run, because we are both well within accurate range of these guns, inaccurate shots as we are.”

Tracy bit at the inside of her cheek, then stopped—she knew it was also one of her movements of indecision, and she saw the other Tracy smile faintly. “Yes, I thought of that . . .”

The clone-Tracy widened her smile a trifle. “Yes, I know you did. It’s a good thing Father taught us at least to shoot, though, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Tracy nodded, knowing just how “expert” she was and wondering if this duplicate’s ability was better because of her programmed background—or less, due to a sort of carbon-copy effect. This is just like a scene right out of *High Noon,* Tracy realized. And the whole scene—*me* facing *me*—is so unreal like, “only in the movies!”

“I don’t think we should have worried so much about whether Father loved us,” the duplicate interjected, continuing the reminiscence.

“No. He was just busy, I guess . . .” Tracy replied.

“Yes,” the duplicate continued, “but remember our trip to Hawaii when the waves were high and he . . .”

“. . . dove into the water with all his clothes on to make sure I—we—wouldn’t drown.”

The duplicate Tracy nodded. “That’s good to remember whenever I doubt him . . . Well, it’s been good to see you, but, of course . . .” The words hung in the air.

Tracy took a deep breath. She had realized how strangely comforting was the duplicate’s use of “we.” Knowing there was someone just like you, *just* like you, someone to talk to without need to explain, without fear of contradiction, was a nice feeling. Though, she told herself, isn’t it just like talking out loud to yourself? She shook her head in momentary confusion. Odd ideas kept popping into her head, unasked, unbidden. Maybe the duplicate *was* herself—*really* herself—caught in some kind of time-travel paradox, occupying the same space and time. Herself a few hours older, coming back to—

To what?

To kill.

To become the *only* Tracy Ballard.

The time-traveler idea disintegrated. You don’t go back in time to kill *yourself.* You couldn’t, could you? Time-travel paradoxes had always confused her and made her vaguely angry.

Tracy looked hard at the duplicate. She—it—*did* look like her. But there were differences. The nose was a little misaligned, the hair was somehow a bit wrong. The jawline was different, the eyes weren’t quite . . .

Tracy almost laughed. A lifetime of mirror images had trained her to see herself a certain way. Even all the television tape and film of herself had not eliminated that. When she’d watched herself it had been in a cold, professional manner: Was that hair style right for that sort of lighting? Were these questions sensible and did they progress toward a suitable goal? Did she *listen,* really *listen,* to the people she was interviewing? Were her thoughts concise and clear, easily understood to the casual watcher, yet not overly simple for the more sophisticated viewer? Did she use too many gestures? Did she seem too wooden? Not animated enough?

Tracy nodded, finally. She accepted the image of herself *as* herself. And came to the logical conclusion.

“There can only be one of us,” she said.

The duplicate nodded. “Yes. Too bad, really. We could have had a lot of fun putting people on. Being in two places at once. Playing practical jokes on all those dumbheads who played them on us.” The clone laughed. *“Wearing out* our lovers!”

“Trading clothes would be no trouble. We could do our job and spend half of the time on vacation,” Tracy said.

“Or else do it twice as well,” the duplicate added softly.

There was a pause.

“Except that there can only be one of us,” the clone sighed. “We just can’t take any chances.”

“I know,” Tracy responded, her body grown tense as steel.

They watched each other, each aware of the trickery each could employ, each fearing the other—*herself!*

Then the real Tracy suddenly realized something: no duplicate, no clone, no look-alike could possibly be as good as the original. By its very *definition.* Different, yes, but not *better* than the original . . .

They both drew at the same time. Two guns thundered in the Western street.

One of the figures was hit, the powerful projectile driving the body back like a giant fist. It sagged, lifeless, into the ruts of the dusty street.

The other walked forward, bent over and looked down at the dead figure at her feet.

• • •

Nearly exhausted, Chuck Browning stumbled out of a tunnel into the area just beneath the big rocket chamber of Futureworld. Perspiration was streaming down his face and his breath came in great, hacking bursts. His running had by now devolved in to a staggering canter; he careened off walls and pipes and frequently almost tripped. Now he whipped his head around to look behind him, sucking air into his lungs in heaving gasps. Turning back again, he saw ahead of him an iron stairway leading upward and lurched toward it.

A sudden thought prompted him to pull out his wallet and throw it on one of the lower steps; then he turned with a lurch and launched his exhausted body downward. Clattering down the steps with fast-weakening knees, he searched for a place to hide. Spying some bulky empty containers, he staggered over to collapse behind them. He took out his gun and leaned against the wall so that he could watch the staircase he had just come down. Then he attempted to quiet his heaving chest.

• • •

The duplicate Chuck sauntered into the area beneath the Futureworld rocket chamber; he looked fresh and casual. His hair was neat, his clothes unstained by sweat or rumpled by any frantic race. He had, in fact, the Chuck Browning Newsman trademark: casual arrogance.

But he had business to do: the smile faded quickly from his face. He looked at the up staircase, then at the down staircase. Noticing something, he walked over and picked up the wallet and took a few steps upward.

Then he stopped and grinned.

He backed down. "Very nice, Chuck!" he shouted, gazing around shrewdly. "Good idea, man! It makes a fella proud to be *you.*"

He looked at the down staircase for a moment, then moved off in another direction, through an arch at the side of the tunnel.

Chuck, hidden below behind plastic barrels, had regained his breath but his face was still gleaming with sweat.

"Hey, Chuck!" the clone called out once more.

The tall reporter whirled about in panic.

The voice had come from almost behind him, along a passage stacked with empty containers. The duplicate must be behind him, grinning wickedly and aiming his gun. Chuck threw himself into the barrels and fired wildly down the passage just as his duplicate fired. Then he kicked more barrels into the passage, scrambled to his hands and knees, and slipped into a damp niche in the wall. He stood trembling, clutching desperately at his weapon.

The clone-Chuck called out from his place of concealment down the passage. "Hey, man?" Chuck didn't answer and the duplicate continued, conversationally: "You know, Chuck, we're not gonna get anywhere this way." He chuckled. "We're both lousy shots. Hey, remember Sergeant Rucker in Basic?" The clone's voice deepened and barked, snappish, in an imitation of the drill sergeant, " 'Browning, you couldn't hit an elephant in the ass with a bazooka at five paces.' "

As the clone chuckled again, Chuck made a run for the up staircase.

The clone fired, exploding some flammable residue in one of the barrels—which blocked him for an instant. Then he ran after the reporter, leaping over the fallen containers with a deft, athletic ease. But Chuck had disappeared.

The duplicate paused, heard the pounding feet on the iron steps above him, and grinned. He began climbing the staircase, his usual unhurried air returned.

The stairs both Chucks were climbing ran alongside the huge, white,

corrugated-iron mass of the rocket chamber, whose massive circular hinged door had swung slowly outward to admit Chuck and Tracy and Ron Thurlow and Mrs. Reed, among others, to their voyage in Futureworld how many hours? days? before. Chuck was jumping the steps that ran alongside the curving hulk two at a time, and looking eagerly each way for shelter as he passed the various landings. At the first landing he saw no hiding place. He was breathing hard again by the time he gained the second landing.

He had to leave the staircase, he knew; it was too exposed. And he must do it now!

Leaping a two-foot gap that separated the second landing from a wide, semi-circular metal entranceway at the side of the huge room itself, and across from the rocket chamber and its accompanying staircase, Chuck pushed open the entranceway door, FIREDOOR, it said. Blinking the sweat out of his eyes, he stared around through a confusing maze of pipes, cables, and pieces of equipment, including multiple fire extingushers. But there was no exit from the small room.

He hadn't much time. He looked around and saw a coil of heavy black cable on the floor of the room. Its end had red and black clip-on leads attached to it. The cable extended from what appeared to be an electric-power panel on the room's wall. Staggering over to the cable, he looped it around his arm—transferring his gun to the other hand.

The steps of the clone-Chuck still sounded, but far below, and slowly.

Chuck stood in the shadowy entranceway, undecided as to how to rig his trick. Suddenly he noticed, for the first time, that the metal stairway leading up from the second landing was not joined to the stairs below, but was attached only to the huge rocket chamber itself. Looking up, along the chamber, he saw that the stairs above the third landing were identical, disjoined from the stairway below them.

Quickly, he fastened the clips to the iron steps leading up from the second landing but unattached to it. Then he walked back into the small room and pulled down the switch in the power panel. Locating a small piece of metal on the floor of the room, he tossed it across and up onto one of the steps above the second landing. It glowed quickly, then melted into a pool of liquid silver.

Chuck was satisfied. He half closed the firedoor, and took up a position just inside it, his gun at the ready.

Looking around, he gulped and threw a switch.

• • •

The duplicate Chuck had, meanwhile, halted his climb at the first

level and pushed open a similar fire-door. He looked in, then shook his head. “No. I don’t think we’d hide here. A little too soon for *our* taste.”

Ambling back to the stairs, he began his climb to the next floor. He had a faint smile of anticipation. “Suicide . . . without death,” he said to himself and laughed softly.

After a few moments, the clone-Chuck reached the second landing and glanced about. “Now this looks like us!” he murmured.

Above him rose the new metal stairway.

“Of course, you’ve tried to lay another trap!” he called loudly, to the Chuck he knew was hidden. “But what kind? We have a very complicated mind, you and I . . .”

The clone-Chuck leaned back against the stair railing and looked around carefully, a quizzical expression on his face. “Hey, man? Remember that time in Cambodia? When we laid an ambush for that Viet Cong patrol? *That* was clever! Something out of character. Something new,” the clone said, grinning, “that’s what we’d try. Well, we were always very bad with scientific things, but here we are in the middle of all these gadgets. You might say *because* of these gadgets,” he added with a laugh.

He raised his foot and was about to step upward. To Chuck, hidden in the shadows, time seemed to slow and stretch out immeasurably. He saw the foot flex and rise, the movement of the trousers, the leaning forward—

Then the foot stopped.

“Oh! *Damn* good!”

The foot came back. The duplicate Chuck stood on the landing and searched the staircase above. He noticed, now, the leads attached to the railing and traced them across to the metal entranceway and through the firedoor. Smiling, he lifted his gun and fired one of the rocket-propelled explosives into the half-hidden power panel. The panel burst in a shower of sparks and a gush of flame. Several lights went out between the second and third landings and a throbbing motor whined to a halt somewhere.

Desperately, Chuck zigzagged from his hiding place and leveled his gun at the duplicate, not thinking about the killing of “self”—even the duplicated “self”—but only about survival. He pulled the trigger.

There was a dry *click*.

Chuck had no recourse but to throw the empty gun at the clone-Chuck, who was bringing his own weapon to bear. The clone winced and the flaming sword of his shot went wild, splashing fire along the wall of the room.

The real Chuck wheeled and leaped outward for a complex of pipes, valves, cables, steel beams, and other protuberances that made a fast escape ladder upward against the wall. The clone fired again and the explosion ruptured a steam pipe, sending a hissing cloud of hot white fog into the room, luckily concealing the frantically climbing reporter.

The duplicate Chuck now put a hand to his mouth and shouted into the roaring steam. “Be careful, brother! Don’t forget, we’re afraid of heights.”

The tall, impeccably dressed clone then turned and started walking up the iron stairs after the human. He was in no hurry.

• • •

Chuck had discovered an entranceway, far above his pursuer, that led into the rocket chamber itself. He braked himself now on a platform that jutted from the inner chamber wall across toward the gleaming-white simulated rocket on which he had “traveled” earlier in his visit to Delos. Far below he saw robot technicians moving about, going through the preparations for another “launch.”

He looked around desperately for a way down. It was at least five stories to the chamber floor and there seemed to be nowhere to hide, only the corrugated metal façade of the inner rocket chamber itself, curving away around the rocket that faked flight to a space station.

The reporter took a deep breath, looked back the way he had come, shut the entranceway door, and made up his mind.

Stepping decisively up to the platform railing, he climbed over it and edged his way out onto the metal edge of the chamber façade. He was like a mountain climber going across the sheer rock face of a vertical cliff.

He made the classic mistake of looking down.

Freezing, he clung to the small metal edgings with his eyes closed. “They *do* look like ants!” he muttered, the vertigo making his head swim and his stomach lurch. He fought against the scream of terror that was forcing itself up into his throat.

Phobias are not things you can dismiss with rational thoughts. They are the hardest of all fears to combat, because they are often, if not always, emotional, usually based on some childhood incident buried so deep that it is beyond recall. Almost every human being has one or more phobias, some looming large and sometimes even controlling a life. What is sickeningly frightening to one person is nothing to another. It did Chuck Browning no good at all to remember this, to try to rationalize his fears away. It just didn’t work. The only thing he had to combat the fear of heights was his willpower. Nothing else—*nothing*

*else*—would work against his acrophobia. Only desperation had driven him out onto the corrugated metal face of the chamber . . . and only that same desperation would make him move.

Eyes closed, he felt for the next metal indentation with his foot. Finding it, he then reached out a hand to grasp the following one, four feet higher, a modular unit. He sidled along, eyes tightly closed, feeling for every inch of the narrow strips of metal that formed the flanged fittings between the corrugated units.

He reached out once again—and found nothing.

He did not move. Then he waved his hand.

Nothing.

Bending his wrist and arm, he at last found the cool metal. The wall had turned.

He opened one eye, squinting at the wall, and found the niche inset into it. Gratefully he moved to it, then into it, resting for a moment. He caught his breath. With two walls close in, and two places to rest his feet, he felt safer.

Then he heard footsteps on the metal platform he had recently left. Glancing around, he deftly ducked back. His duplicate was on the metal catwalk, smiling softly, looking around him as casually as a stag arriving at a college dance.

But there was a gun in his hand.

Below, the huge rocket-chamber door was swinging open and guest "astronauts" were being led inside.

Chuck's clone carefully gazed around the chamber, then bent over and looked down, obviously trying to see if Chuck was below the platform somewhere, perhaps hiding on another. His eyes searched the corrugated metal façade below; then he turned slowly away, making another quick survey, and started to leave the platform.

Then stopped.

His eyes swung again to the curving chamber face, and he grinned —very faintly, but with satisfaction.

Quickly, he wheeled and trotted along the platform to a catwalk that ran out to the huge crane which extended across the open space above the rocket. Jumping up on the crane itself, he moved it surely along until he could look into the niche against which Chuck had flattened himself.

The reporter blinked, helpless to move, unable to hide. There was nowhere to go, no time to go, and nothing to be done.

The duplicate raised his gun. His grin had faded. He was ready to kill his double. "Suicide without death," he muttered once again. "Ironic . . . Too bad no one will know!"

Chuck stared back. His duplicate was so close to him that a blind man could hardly have missed.

Looking over the gun's sights, the clone-Chuck spoke. "Well, Chuck, it's been a lot of fun. But I've got a plane to catch and a story to write. Anyway, don't feel *too* bad. You're not going to die, exactly. You're just going to be . . . um . . . replaced."

Chuck saw his finger tightening on the trigger . . . squeezing—

*Click!*

Neither of the Chucks could believe it: the gun was empty.

They stared for a moment at each other. Then a surge of hope crossed Chuck's face. He exploded from the niche, recklessly swinging around its edge and scrambling along the chamber façade to the platform once more.

The clone ran back along the crane, down the catwalk, and turned onto the far end of the platform. But all his confidence had evaporated.

By this time, however, Chuck had climbed over the platform railing and had run back through the door into the area outside the rocket chamber, and was climbing the staircases again. He glanced back from the sixth or seventh landing and saw that the clone was racing after him.

Pounding on upward, he spotted another firedoor. Leaping the gap to land on its metal entranceway, he opened the door and discovered that it led outward into the rocket chamber! It was no dead end, as before! Pausing a moment inside the doorway to orient himself, he heard his duplicate rattling up the staircase not far behind him.

At this point in the rocket chamber, a scaffolding ran around the side of the huge room; below, the gleaming rocket pointed up; the chamber floor was seven or eight stories below. Chuck blinked in a sudden reoccurrence of his acrophobia, then threw himself inside the entranceway and banged shut the door.

Standing to one side of the door, he waited.

Seconds later, the duplicate ran through and caught himself on the platform railing.

Chuck launched himself at the clone with a terrifying scream. The reporter missed a neck hold, but got in several kidney punches before the duplicate broke away. The two men—evenly matched—threw themselves at each other in a primitive burst of combat. They punched, gouged, and kicked, then fell to the floor of the platform in a biting, viciously tearing battle.

The clone-Chuck now drove his knee into the reporter's stomach and Chuck thought he was going to retch, but he backhanded the

duplicate, smashing him across the eyes. They rolled apart, each to a precipitous edge of the platform. Then the clone rolled back and kicked out, bruising Chuck's side. In an instant, they were on their knees, fists flying.

Chuck swung and connected; but before he could recover, the duplicate hit him with an almost identical blow. They staggered apart, grasping the railing, to pull themselves erect. Chuck's arms felt like lead but the duplicate seemed still fresh, only a serious grimace showing his effort. The duplicate kicked out once more, but Chuck dodged the knee strike and used the railing to hold on to as he lashed out with both his feet.

The clone jumped back, however, and Chuck's feet only fell to the metal platform with a booming clang. The clone then leaped at Chuck and they grappled, almost motionless, their hands around each other's throat. They fought for breath, soon banging against the railing and using their feet to kick and trip. But they clung together, face to identical face, eyes bulging, mouths contorted—

One of them suddenly fell backward, pulling the other over him by the throat and using his feet to kick out and up. One Chuck flew through the air, his hands reaching for the life-saving railing.

He grabbed at it, his fingers closing around the metal and a scream building in his throat as he felt the weakening of the railing.

With a screech the loose bolts ripped loose.

The railing swung out, raining bolts.

Chuck—one Chuck—screamed as he fell.

Six stories.

He screamed all the way.

The sound of his impact with the rocket chamber floor was sickening, and the remaining figure clung to the railing, gazing down, sucking air into his bruised throat . . .

The rocket now began its "takeoff," its engine spouting vapor and vibrating. A great roaring filled the chamber.

The figure looked down, watching its exact counterpart as it became obscured by the billowing rocket smoke. Then he turned and walked back through the rocket-chamber wall to the staircases beyond.

• • •

A Tracy figure emerged from a tunnel into the power-plant room, her gun in her hand, her face hard and determined, and nervous, too. Crossing the floor of the room unseen by the four hundreds, she jumped abruptly at a scratching sound.

Chuck Browning—or what looked very much like Chuck—jumped out of concealment and grabbed her from behind. She let out a wordless exclamation, then fought him for control of the weapon. She lost, and Chuck held the gun away from her.

They stared at each other in both fear and suspicion.

He slowly swung the gun around until it was pointed up at her, just under her chin. She blinked and gulped, but held his gaze. They stared at each other for another long moment. Then he leaned forward, his head bending down, but still holding the gun under her chin.

Their lips came together tentatively, then harder, until they were kissing without restraint.

• • •

Mort Schneider stood in a quiet spot on the second level and looked down into the Delos reception area. Departing passengers were breaking up into smaller and smaller groups, surging this way and that, exchanging farewells with other guests. But their longest and most ardent good-byes were with the beautiful and handsome Delos robots.

Ron Thurlow had his arm around two beautiful females from Futureworld, grinning and looking woeful alternately as he contemplated what had happened and his approaching departure. Mrs. Reed stood in close company with a handsome space robot, but looking carefully over her shoulder at her husband, who was saying farewell to a young woman in medieval garb. Robots Eric and Erica moved from guest to guest, smiling and wishing them all well.

General Karnovsky and his wife now appeared, smiling with cool dignity, and beaming happiness. Immediately afterward, the Japanese businessman, Takaguchi, entered the reception area, flanked by his two Nipponese companions and grinning and chatting with them. One carried a camera and was using up the last of his film shooting Takaguchi's exit from Delos.

Al and Ed, their arms around four beautiful girls, looked exhausted; and they almost needed the support given them by their lovely companions.

"Good-bye, honey," Al said. "What did you say your name was?"

"Marcella, master."

"Yeah, that's right. You're the one with the string tied in knots, right?"

"No, master, that was Messalina."

"Oh, yeah, sure. Hey, Ed, ol' buddy, did I steer you to a good thing or not, huh, ol' buddy?"

Ed nodded, kissing one of the girls. When he broke free he exclaimed, “Bet your bottom credit card, ol’ buddy!” He staggered a bit and the two flanking women helped him to stay erect. “Whoops! Hey, ain’t science great?” He slapped one of them on her bottom, She yelped, but giggled with feigned and pleased shock.

“Ed, ol’ buddy, I’m starting a new page in the Book of Life, ya hear me?”

“Right here, ol’ buddy. Be listenin’ just as soon as Caesarina here shows me a good good-bye. Start without me, Al!”

“Right! This new page o’ life, y’hear? Brand new. It’s gonna be a page outta the account books, a page of special payments ’n’ stuff. Something to build up a little nest egg no one knows about . . . something for more trips here to Delos.”

“I’m hearing you,” Ed replied.

They passed on and Schneider’s eyes followed them. He pulled a small microphone from his belt kit and pressed a button on its side.

“Memoranda Recorder, this is Dr. Schneider. Have Records and Legal write up a brochure that stresses the tax advantages of business meetings in Delos. Schneider out.”

He put away his mike and resumed watching the departing guests. His eyes were searching and cold, as if all below him were subjects rather than guests or customers.

As Tracy Ballard and Chuck Browning appeared, walking casually and smiling and exchanging a few words with the other guests, Schneider walked down the plush red-carpeted stairs, held up a hand and stopped them. They turned toward him with pleasant expressions.

“I . . . just wanted to see you off personally,” he said, his eyes checking them over.

“Thank you,” Tracy answered with a smile. “It’s been just a fabulous time! I’ll be seeing you next week when I return with our video crew.” She touched Schneider’s arm. “Really, it’s been wonderful, and I hope you’ll thank Mr. Duffy for me.”

The scientist bowed his head fractionally. “I certainly will.” He turned to the tall reporter next to Tracy. “Chuck, what about you? Have we satisfied your suspicions?” His smile was a shark’s smile.

Chuck looked embarrassed, and gave Tracy a quick glance. “Well, uh, I’d like to apologize for that.” Schneider waved his hand as if the apology was not needed, but his eyes were glittering. “But I think your patience with me will be rewarded.” Chuck broke into a boyish smile. “I’m going to write a story that will make everyone who can afford it a Delos customer!”

“That’s wonderful,” Schneider said smoothly, his shark’s smile still

in position.

The public-address system broke in. "*. . . Your attention, please. This is the final call for tram service connecting with Continental flight five-two-seven . . . All aboard, please.*"

Tracy smiled happily at Chuck. "Hey, that's us!"

"Well, so long, doc," Chuck grinned, putting out his hand.

Schneider shook his hand, then Tracy's, and the two reporters turned and started down the hall to the departure area.

Schneider stood watching the departing passengers streaming toward the exits. He saw Chuck and Tracy head for the tram.

Then a scream caused him to whirl around.

He looked back at a small group of passengers and hostesses on his level, farther back along the corridor.

They were recoiling from something, and another woman screamed, then cut off in mid-yell, staggering back against the wall.

Schneider took a step forward, a deep frown appearing on his gaunt face, but the crowd now split apart, moving back from a bleeding figure that was making its stumbling way down the hall.

It was Tracy Ballard.

She lurched toward Schneider, exhausted, lunging awkwardly and painfully, an arm twisted into a strange position. Her eyes had almost rolled back in her head as she reached out with a hand that was shaking uncontrollably.

"They're the—the wrong ones!" she croaked. Her body then gave a twisting jerk to the right and she fell heavily to the carpeted floor.

Schneider did not wait to see the end. Dashing to the edge of the balcony, he looked down into the reception area.

Chuck was staring up at him. Tracy was stepping through the doors and getting onto the tram. The reporter suddenly broke into a wide grin and thrust up his fist in an age-old gesture of insult—one finger sticking up. A vigorous movement of triumph.

As the tram started to move, Chuck, still grinning, turned and ran for it, jumping onto the last car. The tram moved out of Schneider's sight.

The expression on the scientist's face was shocked and disbelieving —as if his concept of reality had been badly misaligned. Defeat overtook him, and he sagged against the balcony railing.

• • •

The stream of laughing, smiling passengers from Delos poured through the glass tunnel at the Salahari Airport. Tracy was waiting for Chuck

by the escalator, and when he appeared, taking long-legged strides, she broke into a fond smile.

“Did you get Arthur?” she asked, grabbing his arm and starting down the tunnel with him.

“Told him the whole story. By the time we get home, it’ll be old news.”

After only a few more steps, Tracy burst out: “You know, I *still* don’t think kissing me was a very scientific way to find out who was who . . . !”

Chuck grinned down at her. “Socks, there are some things you just *can’t* fake!”

• • •

In Master Control at Delos, no one was monitoring the consoles. The screens were lit, but only flecks of occasional interference marred the phosphor-dot surfaces. The machinery hummed, lights blinked automatically, but there were no controllers, no voices, no deft and certain fingers manipulating knobs and punching buttons.

There was only the recorded voice of the public-address system.

*“. . . You are now leaving Delos. The most exciting vacation spot in the history of man. Please come again . . .”* Then the tape jammed. *“Again . . . again . . . again . . . again . . .”*